Football Premiership: Manchester United 0 Arsenal 1

United wounded by Schmeichel's loss

David Lacey at Old Trafford

A FOOTBALL season lasts for months, but so much can change in a matter of minutes. For Manchester United, in the space of nine minutes at Old Trafford last Saturday, an exercise in damage limitation became a salvage job.

In the short term United will be less concerned with the consequences of the late goal from Marc Overmars that has brought their hopes of a fifth Premiership title in six seasons within range of Arsenal's artillery than the hamstring injury suffered by Peter Schmeichel in his effort to save the game.

The loss of a match United could bear; they are, after all, still six points ahead of Arsène Wenger's team even if Arsenal have three games in hand. But the loss of their talented and talismanic Danish goalkeeper for the Champions League quarter-final second leg this week against Monaco is a bitter blow.

This season Alex Ferguson has been convinced that he has a side capable of winning Europe's most prestigious club honour, and as United strode past Juventus and Feyenoord to qualify for the knockout stage with something to spare, the feeling grew that he might be right. Now, however, Ferguson will be forced to field a patched-up, partly-fit team against Monaco, who were easily held in a scoreless game in the Louis II Stadium but have a good away record in the competition.

Thus Ferguson finds himself in precisely the situation he set out to avoid. The Coca-Cola Cup was shrugged aside as surplus baggage. In the FA Cup the team were rotated and well below strength when they went out at Barnsley. Last Saturday's game, like several others, was given a morning kick-off to allow a few more hours of recovery time before a Champions League fixture.



Killer blow . . . Arsenal's Overmars cracks the winner past Schmeichel PHOTO: SHAUN BOTTERILL

Even Arsenal's goal was partly a consequence of United not wanting to take risks with players they would need for the European match. For much of the game Gary Neville, having joined Henning Berg at centre-back in the continued absence of Gary Pallister, had successfully curbed the influence of Dennis Bergkamp through the middle. Then Ronny Johnsen was hurt and immediately replaced by David May, who moved in alongside Berg with Gary Neville switched to other duties.

Within a minute Martin Keown's long ball from deep in his own half had caught the United defence still regrouping. A header from Bergkamp, another from Nicolas Anelka, and there was Overmars, in space, onside and with plenty of time to nod the ball down and take it on a few paces before beating Schmeichel with a low shot into the far corner of the net.

From an Arsenal point of view this was a logical turn of events. From the outset Overmars had been their most likely match-winner, exploiting John Curtis's lack of experience on the left of United's defence and beating Schmeichel on two earlier occasions with shots that drifted just wide of an empty goal.

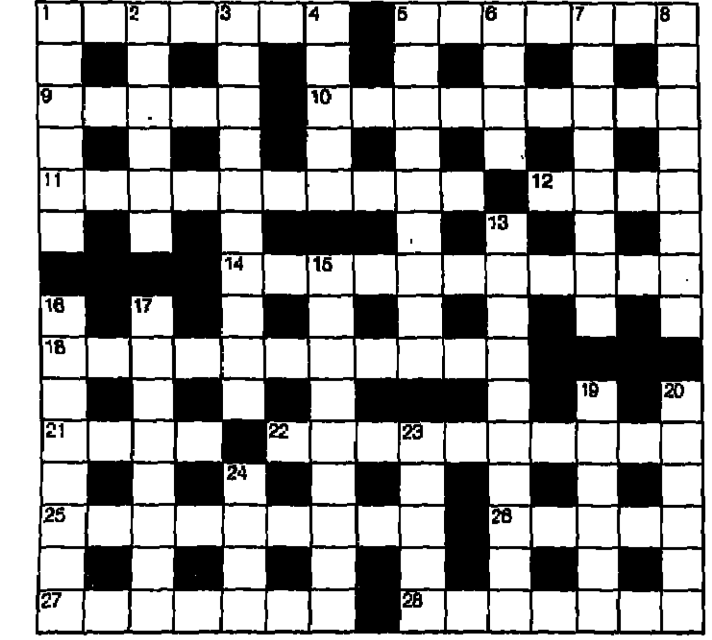
What followed, from United's standpoint, was totally illogical, given the importance of the next few days. Schmeichel makes a habit, when United are losing with only a few minutes to go, of charging upfield for corners. His mistake this time, as Ferguson pointed out, was to stay in the Arsenal penalty area after the corner had been cleared.

As Bergkamp brought the ball away, Schmeichel stretched to intercept and tore a hamstring. Since United had used up their substitutes, moreover, he was forced to hobble through to the end.

"I don't think this defeat will affect Manchester United against Monaco," Wenger said. "The major blow is not psychological, it's losing Schmeichel." And if Schmeichel is out for five weeks, as Ferguson fears, the wound may fester.

Raimond van der Gouw, United's second choice in goal, was partly responsible for Borussia Dortmund's winner in the opening leg of last season's Champions League semi-final. The Dutchman is generally competent but lacks the authority of Schmeichel, which steadies the defence when Pallister is missing. Take away Schmeichel and Pallister against Monaco, and United look vulnerable.

Cryptic crossword by Janus



Across

1 Stroke caused by delayed excision (4,3)
5 Decline to run because not up to it ? (7)
9 Italian type? (5)
10 Soldier under compulsion to study actor's text (9)
11 Wild tale needing fair share of correction (10)
12 Part of church some chaps enjoy (4)
14 Freely offered services in Everton duel? (11)
18 No mere torch it also tells the time (11)
21 Part of register we hear (4)
22 Rush around in old car with lawless Australian (10)
25 Flash of insight during lesson? (9)
26 Many take it to be the same (5)
27 Heart movement lost? Yes! (7)
28 Some stockings and also shoes (7)

Down

1 Cowboy often has one during winding trail (6)
2 Tries to entice casual worker to lead saint astray (6)
3 Oppose having art form to assemble outside (10)
4 It is understood historian has lost American support (5)
5 Daily maid with model hat (3,6)
6 Musical sweetmeat (4)
7 Tourists seeing murderer in back street (8)
8 Rash people had those peculiarities (8)
13 Put up with possible danger from turbulent assembly (4,6)
15 Row about one sumo wrestler in car (9)
16 Is in a hurry to prepare Southern dishes (8)
17 Churchmen having second thoughts about counselling service (8)
19 She conceals weapon in fancy hat (6)
20 Do they go straight when taken in hand by bishops? (6)
23 Workmen from north and south (5)
24 Queen of idleness it seems (4)

Last week's solution

		S	W	E	E	T	H	E	A	R	T	S		
S		L		L		U		S		E		T		S
C	L	A	V	I	E	R		C	A	L	O	R	I	E
O		N		Z		N		H		I		A		N
R	I	G	M	A	R	O	L	E		G	E	N	E	T
E		E				U		A		I		G		R
S	E	X	T		S	T	A	T	I	O	N	E	R	Y
		P		D						N		T		
P	A	R	C	E	L	P	O	S	T		D	O	O	M
L		E		M		O		I				R		I
A	E	S	O	P		M	A	T	C	H	L	E	S	S
C		S		S		P		T		Y		L		H
E	P	I	S	T	L	E		I	N	D	I	A	N	A
T		O		E		I		N		R		T		P
		N	U	R	S	I	N	G	H	O	M	E		

Tennis

Chilean is too hot for Rusedski

Guardian Reporters

GREG RUSEDSKI, the world's fastest server, delivered 19 aces last Sunday but still lost the ATP Champions Cup final to the flamboyant Marcelo Rios in Indian Wells, California, after a match featuring two tie-breaks, the first spanning 32 points.

Consolation for the British No 1 came with his climbing one place in the world rankings, regaining fifth spot, after his 6-3, 6-7, 7-6, 6-4 defeat by the Chilean. Rios's triumph in this Super 9 event, carrying extra points, elevated him higher, from seventh to third.

Rios, who lost the Australian Open final to Petr Korda in January, was always in charge in this first meeting between the two left-handers after Rusedski's usually potent serve, which had brought him another world record (240kmh) last Saturday, let him down in the opening set, with only 33 per cent of his first serves landing in.

Rusedski's service was stronger in the second set, which went to a marathon 17-15 tie-break with the Briton clinching it on his sixth set point. But he struggled to break Rios's serve and lost the third set on another tie-break (7-4).

In the fourth set honours were again even until a double fault, Rusedski's 12th of the match, presented Rios with a 5-4 lead. Rios's serve was never broken, even though he sent down only six aces, and he capitalised on his first match point.

Rusedski had reached the final by beating Thomas Muster in straight sets with the aid of his second service world record in the space of 24 hours. He triumphed 7-6, 6-1 in his semi-final with the Austrian after launching the 240kmh serve in the 11th game of the first set. It beat his own record delivery against Sweden's Thomas Enqvist in the quarter-finals.

Rusedski glanced at the radar gun as the service landed, and said later: "It felt really good and I had a little smile to myself."

Martina Hingis took only 63 minutes to defeat Lindsay Davenport in straight sets to win the women's final and the Evert Cup at the same venue. The world No 1 triumphed 6-3, 6-4 to avenge a defeat by the American in the Pan Pacific final in Tokyo last month.

The 21-year-old Davenport, Hingis's closest rival in the world rankings, often looked nervous in the first set and the Swiss, who successfully defended her Australian Open title in January, took charge early, racing to a 5-0 lead with breaks in the second and fourth games. Davenport dropped her serve for the first time with a double fault and lost the second with two forehand errors. Hingis secured the only break of the second set in the fifth game.

The Guardian Weekly

Vol 158, No 13
Week ending March 29, 1998

UK warned of Saddam anthrax plot

Lucy Ward

PRESIDENT Saddam Hussein has threatened to attack Britain with the lethal toxin anthrax smuggled into the country in duty-free goods, it emerged on Monday.

The threat by the Iraqi leader came to light following the leaking of an all-ports warning issued last week and approved by Tony Blair. The Prime Minister's official spokesman confirmed the document was genuine, but said there was no evidence the plot had been or would be implemented.

The date of the memo confirms that Downing Street still regarded the threat as serious even after the 11th-hour agreement on February 22 to avert United States and British air attacks in the crisis over Iraqi weapons inspections. Britain's Nato partners have also been alerted.

The document, released to Customs and Excise, Special Branch, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence, is understood to have been based on information from a source believed to have access to intelligence in Baghdad. There were suggestions that the alert is not the first of its kind.

It reveals a plot to smuggle large quantities of anthrax into "hostile countries" inside bottles containing spirits, cosmetics, cigarette lighters and perfume sprays. It warns: "Iraq may launch chemical and biological attack using materials disguised as harmless fluids."

The Government denied that there was cause for alarm. Home Office minister Mike O'Brien said: "There is no specific threat so far as we can gather to Britain. I don't think this is a greater threat than many of the others that have been made."

Anthrax is a micro-organism that can kill within four days of inhalation and is fatal in 80 per cent of cases.

Julian Borger adds: Richard Butler, the United Nations chief weapons inspector, arrived in Baghdad last Sunday as the race began to unearth Iraq's "smoking gun" — hard evidence of concealed weapons of mass destruction.

He was expected to open talks with the government this week to put to the test the UN's memorandum of understanding with President Saddam aimed at securing unrestricted access for weapons inspectors.

The talks with Iraq's deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, seek to pave the way for an inspection of President Saddam's palaces by groups of experts and diplomats starting on Tuesday and ending on April 6. They want to check the sites for evidence of chemical or biological weapons.

Mr Butler said the UN accord had been holding and promised a speedy end to the inspections if the Iraqi open-door policy continued.

I NEED NEW, YOUNG, DYNAMIC, LIVELY IMAGE! YOU'RE ALL FIRED!!!

©Steve Bell 1998

Yeltsin ignites Russia crisis

James Meek in Moscow

AN OBSCURE former shipping engineer, Sergei Kiriyenko, was a heartbeat away from control of a former superpower's nuclear arsenal this week after President Boris Yeltsin cast Russia into political turmoil by sacking his long-serving prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and all 33 members of his government.

Mr Yeltsin, a recipient of heart bypass surgery who returned to the Kremlin on Monday after the latest in a long series of illnesses, plucked Mr Kiriyenko, aged 35, from the energy minister's desk to become acting prime minister.

Under the Russian constitution, the prime minister takes over as acting head of state for three months if the president is incapacitated or dies. But because Mr Kiriyenko's new status has not been confirmed, any failure of Mr Yeltsin's fragile health could lead to a struggle without rules for the nuclear button and the governance of Russia.

"The president has begun a new constitutional crisis," said one political analyst, Lilia Shevtsova. "Until the new government is approved by parliament we are in a dangerous period."

Mr Chernomyrdin, the stolid, pragmatic, inarticulate former gas industry chief who over five years as prime minister came to symbolise Russia's hesitant economic reforms, took the unexpected blow on the chin. "The hardest, the dirtiest, the most thankless work has, of course, already been done by us," he said. "Now it's necessary to move forward."

The compensation that Mr Yeltsin offered him — a job campaigning for Yeltsin allies in future elections — was meagre exchange for the eclipse of Mr Chernomyrdin's own presidential ambitions. Mr Yeltsin awarded him the Order of Services to the Fatherland, second class. Asked why he had not been given first class, the presidential press spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, said: "That's reserved for the president."

Appearing on television, Mr Yeltsin spoke warmly of the prime minister's work but said it was time for fresh faces in the cabinet. "The dismissal of the government does not mean a change of course," he said. "It is an effort to make economic reforms more energetic and effective, to give them a political push, a new impulse."

He added: "Unfortunately, people don't feel change is for the better. I believe that recently the government has been lacking dynamism and initiative, new outlooks, fresh approaches and ideas. And without this, a powerful breakthrough in the economy is impossible."

Most members of the government, including the young liberal Boris Nemtsov, will keep their portfolios for the time being while Mr Kiriyenko draws up a cabinet.

But two prominent figures lose their jobs: Anatoly Chubais, the deputy prime minister and unpopular architect of Russian privatisation; and his ideological opposite Anatoly Kulikov, the head of the police force and interior ministry army, a key figure in maintaining government control in the face of any unrest.

After shying at the news, financial markets in Russia and around the world settled as Mr Yeltsin, Mr Yastrzhembsky and Mr Kiriyenko in turn promised no change in the government's course of economic reform.

"There will be no new government programme. There will be a continuity of policy," Mr Kiriyenko said, saying he had heard of his appointment only that morning.

Mr Kiriyenko is an economic liberal and a protégé of Mr Nemtsov. But he may be a transitional figure. The old standard-bearer of Russian liberals, Grigory Yavlinsky, flew to Moscow on Monday saying that he had been "invited" and that he might head a new government.

The dismissal of Mr Chernomyrdin, whom Mr Yavlinsky regarded as a corrupt energy baron, was one of Mr Yavlinsky's previous conditions for entering the government.

The Kremlin was talking up Mr Kiriyenko's chances, but his inexperience may count against him. Pragmatic regional leaders such as Yegor Stroyev, Konstantin Titov and Dmitri Ayatskov are likely alternatives.

Comment, page 12

Titanic sails away with record 11 Oscars

Arthur Spiegelman in Los Angeles

THE greatest ship that ever sank found a berth in Hollywood history on Monday as Titanic sailed off with 11 Oscars, tying the record for most Academy Awards won by a single film.

That, plus the record-breaking $1 billion it has grossed since opening 14 weeks ago, assures it a place as one of Hollywood's greatest success stories — after its record-breaking $200 million cost threatened to make it one of the screen's biggest failures.

"You've made this a night to remember, let's party until dawn," crowed James Cameron, the film's co-producer, screenwriter, co-editor and director as he received his third award of the night — the prize for best picture.

Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt, the odd couple in As Good As It Gets, walked off with the top acting awards at the 70th Academy Awards, with Nicholson joking he had "this sinking feeling all night" until he won. It was his third Oscar.

Titanic won Oscars for best picture, best director, cinematography, sound, sound effects, visual effects, editing, art direction, original score, song and costumes.

It went into the Oscars with 14 nominations and left with 11 gold statues, tying the record for the most awards set in 1959 by Ben-Hur, another epic.

Hunt beat some of Britain's best actresses to win the award, Dame Judi Dench, Kate Winslet, Julie Christie and Helena Bonham Carter.

With Hunt winning best actress and Kim Basinger of LA Confidential taking the best supporting actress award, Titanic was shut out of the only two acting awards it was up for.

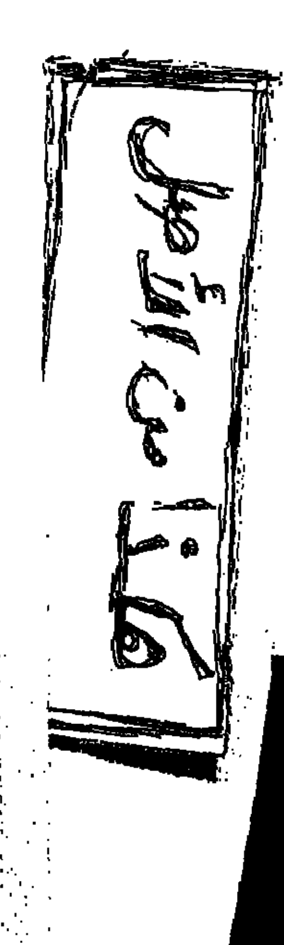
Robin Williams won the award for best supporting actor for his role in Good Will Hunting. "Thank you, this may be the one time I am speechless," he said.

The British best picture nominee The Full Monty was honoured with the award for best original musical or comedy score.

The Dutch film Character was named the year's best foreign film.

Oscars show host Billy Crystal quickly set the tone of the evening when he declared, "Good evening and welcome to the Titanic. We're just like the Titanic. We are huge, we are expensive and everybody wants us to go faster." — *Reuters*

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK17	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 14	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 500	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,500	Switzerland	SF 3.80



Suharto's weapons cost the country dear

JOHN AGLIONBY outlined the daunting problems facing Indonesians because of the current economic crisis (Indonesia's élite spits defiance, March 15). While much has been written by the Western media on this crisis, there is one important factor that the International Monetary Fund and many journalists are neglecting to address: the vast amount of money that President Suharto and his generals are spending on the military.

The cost of maintaining the Indonesian army in East Timor is reportedly about $1 million a day. The expenditure to keep troops in West Papua (Irian Jaya) must be even greater, given the larger population of indigenous people and the much larger land mass to control. Now more is being spent to repress dissenting Indonesians as they struggle to survive the culmination of decades of corruption, brutality and mismanagement.

It seems surprising that the IMF has not sought to limit the massive military expenditure that the dictatorship needs to continue its genocide and crimes against humanity. In the dark ages of economic rationalism, the issue of human rights is not considered important when there are profits to be made — in this case the pirating of East Timor's and West Papua's oil and mineral resources.

If these crimes were being committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Suharto and his corrupt generals would be facing charges of genocide and gross violations of human rights.

The slogan of those concerned about another possible conflict in Iraq is "No blood for oil". In South-east Asia there is much blood being shed for stolen oil, while the IMF and Western governments fail to tackle the brutal Suharto regime in Indonesia.

Andrew Alcock,
Forestville, South Australia

WHILE the forces of "Truth, Justice and the American way" lie in wait in the Persian Gulf to enforce United Nations resolutions against Iraq, perhaps they could enforce long-standing UN resolutions 242 and 425 demanding Israel's withdrawal from occupied Palestine and neighbouring countries, including Syria's Golan Heights and southern Lebanon.

A quick, determined response to these resolutions would send a message to other aggressors (such as Indonesia in East Timor and Irian Jaya), that this behaviour will not be tolerated by the international community, and that no double standards are being applied.

C Barrett,
East St Kilda, Victoria, Australia

Lights out in Auckland

IT WAS good to hear from Will Hutton again, and on the blackout in my city no less (Darkness at the heart of privatisation, March 15). Yes, the real issue is runaway privatisation, but the smokescreens that have been thrown up by all parties to hide this is the real blackout. The prime minister, Jenny Shipley, is calling it an act of god, her coalition partner is targeting the law firm that set up the privatisation, the one daily newspaper in Auckland blames the heatwave, and the privatised company itself (Mercury) is calling for prayers as well as longer lunchbreaks.

Hutton recommends consumer ownership of such important utilities, but our government is ahead on that too — Mercury *is* "owned" by its consumers. But the privatisation legislation has manifold ways of maintaining appearances while making sure the reality is private enterprise — with the results that Hutton outlines. Collapses of such utilities just enlarge market opportunities: the companies Mercury was trying to take over are now targeting it, everybody is suing everybody else, and the prime minister is turning a blind eye.

Steven Webster,
Auckland, New Zealand

AUSTRALIA shares to the full the absurd situation devastatingly described in New Zealand and England by Will Hutton, and this month Melbourne has twice seen the serious abuse of civil liberties that this often brings.

At Group 4's brand-new Port Phillip Prison the compulsory customers were provoked into "riot" by the conditions. The Guardian Weekly describes the other: the Quantas Grand Prix at Albert Park. This great, central, public park was stolen four years ago without consultation, and is now virtually privatised for four months of the year for commercial profit, notably tobacco advertising.

Noel McLaclan,
Melbourne, Australia

Preserve the final frontier

WITH the announcement of the discovery of water on the Moon it seems that the boundaries of the final frontier may now be breached (Water on the Moon, March 15). I was saddened, however, to see that you reported this find and its attendant possibilities with unfettered delight. At a time when we are still trying to come to terms with the consequences of imperial expansion and colonisation, I would have expected your attitude to be a little less gung-ho.

Fortunately the Moon has no indigenous life-forms, but there are already several abandoned human-made objects littering its surface and the stewardship of our own planet certainly leaves something to be desired. The wholesale destruction of rainforest in South America, the presence of crumbling and highly toxic nuclear reactors in the countries of the former Soviet Union, the inappropriate construction of colossal dams, and the disintegration of our last great wilderness, the Antarctic, through global warming, have been going on for years.

What, then, are the implications for an area beyond the reach of all but a handful of governments and, perhaps one day soon, of multinational conglomerates?

While recognising the almost limitless potential of this latest discovery, perhaps we should also take the opportunity to pause and consider the awesome nature and potential ramifications of what is being proposed, before our species rushes in to violate yet another virgin wilderness.

Simon Stanley,
London

I WAS appalled at the remarks of United States scientists concerning the discovery of ice deposits on the Moon: "We can fuel up"; "this is a significant resource". The incredibly exploitative, arrogant and anthropocentric attitude demonstrated is one of the root causes of the environmental rape inflicted on the Earth. The Moon is not ours to plunder and despoil. In the name of all that's rational, let's restrict the human plague to this planet and let the rest just be.

Howard Fisher,
Cooranbong, NSW, Australia

IT IS consistent, but terrifying, that the major economic powers responsible for most of the destruction of our planet's resources, have already made concrete plans to exploit the newly discovered resources of our nearest neighbour, the Moon.

(Dr) Charles Douglas,
East Victoria Park, Western Australia

Across the great divide

NEIL JORDAN still seems to think that the critics of his film Michael Collins were merely carping about minor details of historical inaccuracy (Slaves of the past, February 22) and did so for political reasons. Nonsense. Any film dealing with such charged political events is bound to be contentious.

The flaw is that the film tries to deal with the Partition of Ireland in 1922 without mentioning the Ulster Protestants and the religious/cultural divide that separates North and South. No one in the film gives voice to the viewpoint of the Protestants of the North and their fears that an independent Ireland would be dominated by Catholics. As a result, Collins is seen to submit to partition, not because the North had the same right to self-determination as the South, but simply because Lloyd George threatened him with war.

Inevitably then, the film passes over the treaty negotiations because it has no concept of what was being negotiated. Instead, the rivalry between Collins and De Valera is placed centre stage, as if their differences were more important than the historical division in the people.

Jordan ignored the real tragedy of Irish history, which is the divisive role of religion. Within a few years of its inception in 1922 the Irish Free State turned itself into a Catholic state, enforcing Catholic values through legislation — regardless of the opposition of prominent Protestants in the South. Meanwhile the North became ultra-Protestant, with its Orange parades, clergymen politicians and sectarian riots.

The situation today is a direct descendant of Collins's times — the Free State that he helped to create is now trying to shake off Catholic orthodoxy, while the North is still hostile and suspicious. Fanatical extremes on both sides are prepared to murder and maim in the name of their tribe.

A good film will address those issues, allowing the awkward viewpoints that Jordan has suppressed to be heard. In so doing it will help us to escape from the terrible legacy of the past. I hope that Jordan's next foray into Irish politics will be that film.

Les Reid,
County Antrim, Belfast

Briefly

WH TRZASKA claims that students around the world are learning American, not English (March 1). One might ask, what is American? Apache or Sioux or the Spanish of South and Central America are all good candidates.

The Washington Post and the Guardian Weekly are both written in the same language, but within both North America and Britain, as well as in other parts of the world, there are enormous variations in pronunciation and, to some extent, vocabulary and usage. But English speakers can understand each other easily.

The huge demand for English is to a large extent generated by the dominance of the United States, but it has also become convenient to use it as an international language. Here in Mozambique, English is a foreign language, but it is commonly used for contacts with other African countries as well as with many other English and non-English speaking parts of the world.

Barbara Webb,
Maputo, Mozambique

IT IS not only volunteers to work in the Third World who are in short supply (March 8). It is becoming more and more difficult to find volunteers of any age to do mundane but essential tasks for no financial reward. It may be more connected with 18 years of emphasis on self-reliance and the concept that there is no such thing as society, as lack of concern for those in distant parts.

Diane Munday,
St Albans, Hertfordshire

THE Prime Minister may declaim that "Greenwich is the place where the millennium begins", (March 8) but surely this is mindless, Eurocentric, neo-colonial, imperialistic blubber. On January 1, 2000, the day will begin — as it always does — at the international dateline in mid-Pacific.

Ron Haggart,
Toronto, Canada

YOUR front page headline "Authors quit in revolt against Murdoch" (March 8) made me think, whatever has Iris done?

Benjamin Lovell,
Wilmington, Delaware, USA

AFTER reading Maya Jaggi's article (February 22), I am confused. Earl Lovelace did spend years in Tobago a long time ago but he has spent more time in Trinidad, where he now lives. The capital of Tobago, if there is one, must be Scarborough; Port of Spain is the capital of Trinidad and Tobago.

Arlene Blade,
Scarborough, Tobago, West Indies

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Le Pen splits French right

Paul Webster in Paris

AN ATTEMPT by Jean-Marie Le Pen to seize control of the Marseille region for the racist National Front failed on Monday as a national outcry at the dangers of extremism tore rightwing parties apart.

Jacques Chirac appealed to conservatives to rally around the presidency. The Gaullist head of state wants to create a movement to oppose rightwing extremism and provide a balance to the increasingly powerful Socialist-led administration.

Mr Le Pen persuaded five rightwing leaders to ally with the National Front in other regional elections last week, giving his movement its first real taste of shared power. He demanded a reciprocal gesture from the Gaullists and the centre-right to enable him to govern the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur assembly in Marseille.

But public outrage and presidential anger at opportunist pacts with the extremists obliged conservatives to drop their original plan to back Mr Le Pen, hours before the Marseille assembly met. A Socialist former foreign minister, Michel Vauzelle, was elected chairman.

In the Ile de France assembly covering Paris, the largest of France's 22 regions, another Socialist, Jean-Paul Huchon, won after Gaullist councillors refused an alliance with the National Front.

The voting took place against the background of street protests organised by students and human rights organisations.

In Toulouse the Midi-Pyrénées president, Marc Censi, was re-elected with National Front backing but immediately resigned. He was the second leader of the Union for French Democracy (UDF) to refuse a deal. Five provincial leaders have been expelled for accepting deals.

The Gaullist mayor of Le Havre, Antoine Rufenacht, outgoing chairman in Haute-Normandie, dropped out of the race for chairman because the National Front was in a position to arbitrate.

In the overseas region of La Réunion, a Communist, Paul Vergès, twin brother of the lawyer Jacques Vergès, was elected chairman.

A rethink on the right was inevitable in the wake of the *département* (county council) elections last Sunday, in which the left took more than 400 seats and 11 councils from the right as voters withdrew their support from the Gaullists and the centre-right UDF. The left now controls 31 county councils, the right 62.

Summing up a week of crisis in the rightwing parties, the former foreign minister Hervé de Charette said the alliances made with Mr Le Pen's followers were as important as the May 1968 student riots and François Mitterrand's presidential victory in 1981.

"It is the ruin of the French right," he added. "Perhaps we'll soon know who are the authors of this sinister plot prepared over a long period. Those who have saved their seats [by joining with the National Front] have done it by sacrificing the republic."

Prominent conservatives poured contempt on leaders who accepted the National Front's conditions, describing them as traitors.

Gaullist MPs blamed former secretary-general Jean-François Mancel, who started the revolt, for the loss of scores of county council seats. But on Monday he said it was crucial to start talking with Mr Le Pen about his anti-immigration plans.

The press was nearly unanimous in condemning the rise of the National Front. Only the rightwing Figaro played down the crisis, calling it a "nervous breakdown" caused by a sudden awareness that the Front played a key role in French politics.

Le Monde, page 23

TB back on rampage

Sarah Boseley

TUBERCULOSIS epidemics in 16 countries where attempts to halt the spread of the disease have stalled are endangering the entire globe, the World Health Organisation said last week. In an effort to bring home the real danger that tuberculosis poses to the world, the WHO named the 16 countries that it says must do more to control the disease.

While half are poor countries, the other eight are in the middle to upper-middle income bracket. Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Thailand all have enough money to tackle TB but are not doing as much as they should or have left it too late to implement the Dots programme (Directly Observed Treatment, Short course) that the WHO says could bring the epidemic under control.

The other eight — Afghanistan, Ethiopia, India, Burma, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan and Uganda — have not only left it too late but have little money to spend on health.

About 3 million people die from the disease every year and the figures are rising. It is easily spread, especially now that international travel is common, by coughing and sneezing.

Most alarmingly, where people with the disease have failed to finish their six or eight month course of treatment the TB bacillus becomes immune to antibiotics.

It is estimated that up to 50 million people may be infected with the multi-drug resistant (MDR) form of the disease, even if they are not themselves ill. New York is still struggling with an outbreak. While ordinary TB is cheap to cure, the cost of treating a patient with the MDR form is up to $245,000. The WHO declared an emergency in 1993. Since then, cases have inexorably risen.

"Some governments did not take the WHO's declaration of a global TB emergency seriously," said Arata Kochi, director of its global tuberculosis programme. Critics say the WHO ought to have done more to persuade governments of the dangers of failing to act.



President Clinton shakes hands with Ghanaians at Independence Square in Accra on Monday at the start of his tour of six African states. Mr Clinton, who was accompanied by his wife Hillary, spent less than 10 hours in Ghana before flying out to Uganda, Rwanda, South Africa, Botswana and the former french colony of Senegal. *Comment, page 12; Washington Post, page 13* PHOTOGRAPH: GREG GIBSON

'US troops massacred 1,000 Somalis'

Richard Dowden

AS PRESIDENT Bill Clinton began a six-country tour of Africa on Monday, new evidence emerged of how trapped United States troops indiscriminately gunned down crowds of Somalis in Mogadishu in 1993, killing more than 1,000 — five times the "official" number.

In a dramatic new account of the battle in central Mogadishu, collated from hours of interviews with US and Somali survivors, Mark Bowden of the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper has revealed that US troops abandoned their rules of engagement — to fire only when threatened by fire — and shot down every Somali they saw, including men, women and children.

It happened 10 months after US marines landed in Mogadishu as part of a humanitarian effort to feed starving Somalis cut off by the civil war. On the afternoon of October 3, 1993, 40 Delta special forces soldiers and about 75 Rangers set off to try to capture Somali leaders supporting General Mohammed Farah Aidid, the Mogadishu warlord, who were meeting in a house near the city centre.

According to Bowden's account, US troops took hostages and murdered the wounded and a prisoner. They also used the bodies of dead Somalis as barricades.

Bowden also reveals that, contrary to the official version of the mission (that it was not intended to kill anyone), helicopter gunships began the ill-fated raid by firing anti-tank missiles into houses. The US has never held any public investigation or reprimanded any of its commanders or troops.

The revelations of the Mogadishu massacre come after the US finally laid to rest the ghosts of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam in 1968 by awarding a medal to the officer who exposed the atrocity.

At the time of the Mogadishu incident the world's media was more interested in footage of US soldiers' bodies being dragged through the streets. The Somali death toll was reported as being around 200. Bowden, however, quotes Robert Oakley, the US special representative to Somalia, as saying that more than 1,000 Somalis were killed.

The incident occurred after the US-led peace-keeping force had handed over to a multinational United Nations force. The UN was not informed about the raid.

Backed by 17 helicopter gunships, US troops stormed the building where the Somali leaders were meeting and took 24 prisoners. They planned to drive the 5km back to the US base but could not get out of the area.

The convoy was trapped by hundreds of Somali gunmen firing AK-47s and rocket grenades from rooftops. It was eventually rescued by units from Pakistan and Malaysia after US troops had been involved in their biggest fire-fight since the Vietnam war. — *The Observer*

The Week

PRESIDENT Fidel Castro of Cuba welcomed the first signs of a thaw in relations with Washington, after the United States reinstated humanitarian flights to the island and loosened restrictions on exiles sending cash back to relatives.

Washington Post, page 14

THE Congo government has given a United Nations team that is exhuming bodies in its investigation of alleged massacres of Rwandan Hutus by Laurent Kabila's forces until next week to leave, saying it was "shocked" at the desecration of graves.

TALKS in Geneva between China, the US and the two Koreas on a peace treaty to put an end to hostilities on the Korean peninsula have run into serious difficulties, the Chinese chairman said. Chen Jian said it was not certain that a new round of talks would be called.

PRESIDENT Frederick Chiluba has lifted Zambia's state of emergency, imposed after a failed coup last October. The decision is expected to please Western aid donors.

LIBYA scored a propaganda coup at the United Nations when dozens of countries backed Tripoli's call for the lifting of the sanctions imposed after the Lockerbie bombing.

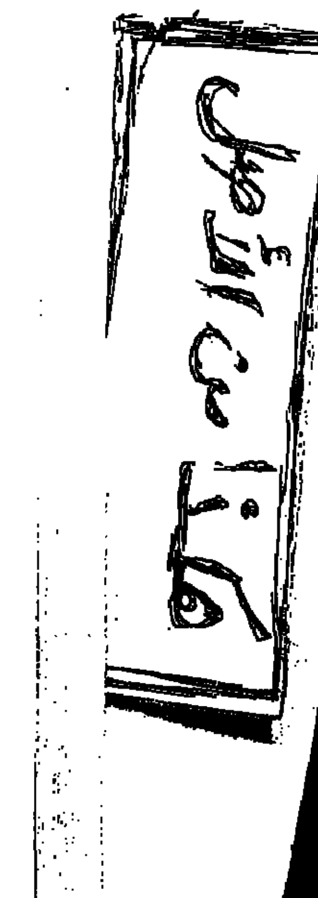
CAMBODIA'S King Norodom Sihanouk issued an amnesty for his son Prince Norodom Ranariddh, opening the way for the ousted prime minister to contest a general election and reviving the peace process.

PRESIDENT Albert René and his Seychelles People's Progressive Front have won the country's presidential and parliamentary elections.

THOUSANDS of Serbs marched through the Kosovan provincial capital Pristina in protest at an agreement between Serb and ethnic Albanian leaders that promises Albanians state education in their own language. They have been excluded from the state education system for the past seven years.

THE German group Bertelsmann, Europe's biggest media and publishing conglomerate, moved to dominate the English-speaking world of books by announcing it was taking over the US publishing group Random House.

A JAPANESE soldier, aged 77, who was missing for 52 years until found in Russia last year, has arrived home. Toshimasa Meguro was accused of being a spy and imprisoned for eight years in Siberia at the end of the second world war. He said he was expected to remain in the region after his release.



Brazil fires threaten Yanomami reserve

Alex Bellos in Roraima

THE smell of burning fills the air. The sky is a white haze of smoke. "Fire is coming," says the Yanomami man, pointing into the distance, "and we are afraid."

Less than 10km away the jungle is ablaze. Plumes of smoke rise from the jungle canopy, making the normally lush horizon look like a line of factory chimneys. An entire ecosystem is being destroyed, and as the inferno gradually encroaches on the Yanomami reservation it is threatening the world's largest Stone Age tribe.

"We are afraid the animals will leave — the monkeys and deer," says the Yanomami man, whose name, in his native language Ninah, is never revealed outside his tribe. Surrounded by members of his family at the Mucajai river, he adds: "If they go we will have nothing to eat. We will die."

Elders in neighbouring settlements had already started a sacred ceremony, he said, only performed in the face of environmental catastrophe: snorting the hallucinogenic bark of the virola tree and entering a trance.

"We would do it here," he said. "But the man who knew the ritual died two years ago. All we can do here is hope for rain."

The primary rainforest has never caught fire before because it is normally too wet, according to environmental experts. But it has not rained for three months, and the forest's edges are catching alight from one of the region's largest ever savannah fires, which is affecting up to 52,000sq km.



Although specialised firefighters and helicopters have arrived from Argentina, and the Brazilian army has sent reinforcements, the fires are not expected to be extinguished until the arrival of the rains, forecast for mid-April. Surprisingly, Brazil lacks its own airborne fire service and until this week much of the stricken areas were inaccessible.

"We lost control of this thing a long time ago," the fire brigade captain Kleber Gomes Cerquinho said.

There are as yet no accurate figures of how much rainforest has been destroyed. Flying over the area, a front of smouldering forest can be seen at least 15km into the Yanomami reservation — only a few kilometres from the settlement on the other side of the Mucajai river. The wind appears to be moving the front deeper into the forest. As far as the eye can see, smoke billows out from under the canopy.

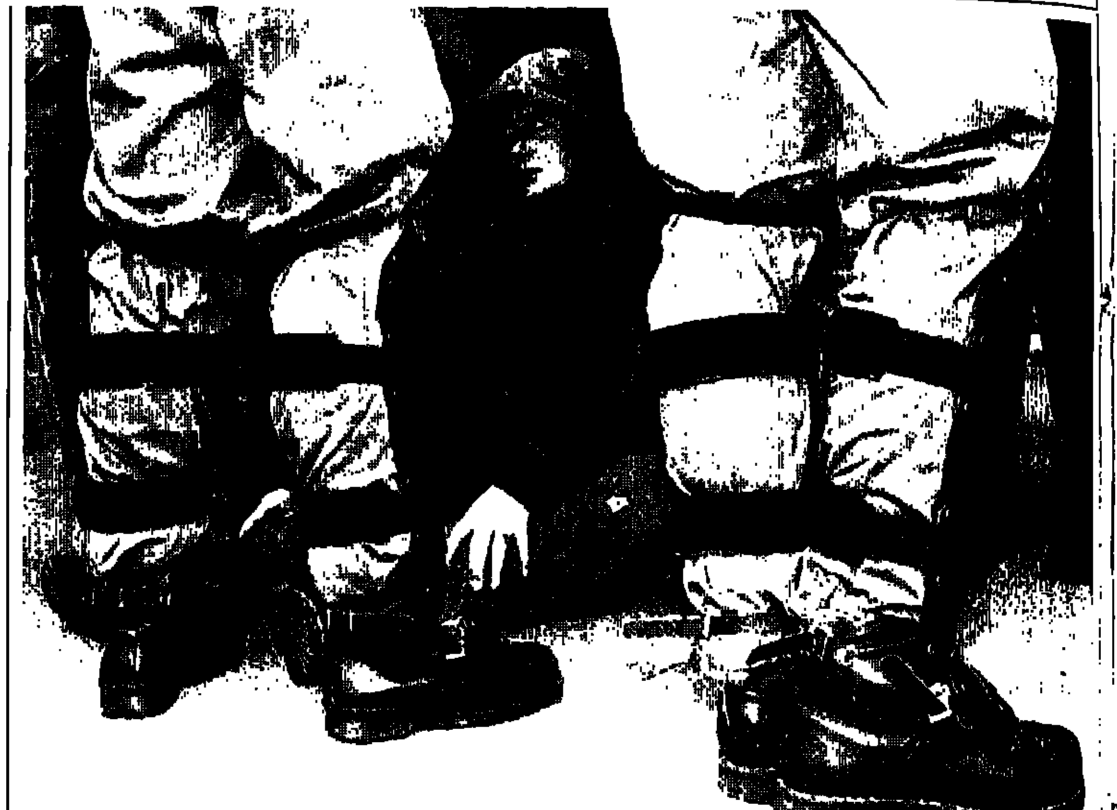
The flames have turned tree leaves and branches an autumnal orangy brown. Through the branches one can see that all the vegetation on the ground had been destroyed, leaving a mat of black ash. Occasionally there were glimpses of small flames.

"This is very bad. The fire is burning the base of the trees. A lot are dying, so next year there will be more burning, and it will be worse. You have started a process in motion which will destroy the whole forest," said Professor Philip Fearnside of the independent Institute for Amazonian Research.

In January the fires were already out of control, and the Roraima state government declared a state of emergency. Yet farmers are still burning their land, despite television broadcasts telling them to stop.

This year's savannah fire is believed to be the worst in almost a century. It is the combined result of a dry season prolonged by the El Niño weather phenomenon, strong winds and settlers burning their land. Farmers scorch land to clear it and because the ash is a useful fertiliser.

The government estimates that more than 12,000 cattle have died and 15,000 families have been seriously affected.



Boot camp . . . A protester sits surrounded by police in demonstrations against the storage of nuclear waste at Ahaus on Germany's border with Holland. About 30,000 police were deployed to escort a delivery of waste to the storage site. They vastly outnumbered the protesters PHOTOGRAPH PHILFF[illegible]

Swiss bankers wary of role in 'dirty money' war

Harriet Martin in Geneva

THE Swiss banking culture of privacy and confidentiality is under threat from a new law to combat money laundering that aims to redress the country's international reputation for harbouring "dirty money".

The law, which comes into force next month, obliges bankers to inform the Swiss authorities if they have suspicions about the origins of money in clients' accounts.

Carla Del Ponte, the Swiss prosecutor-general, last month told a conference of officials responsible for implementing the law: "There's enormous international pressure on Switzerland to act. At last we can say we're leading the war on dirty money."

Since 1990, when an international code combating money laundering was established, Swiss banks have had a right to inform the authorities of suspicious accounts, but they were not under an obligation to do so.

Now they will be, and the new law extends to financial intermediaries such as money-changers, lawyers and insurers. It also includes an obligation to freeze suspicious accounts.

Many bankers feel uneasy. Michael Wyler, of the Geneva Financial-Centre Foundation, says the law will change Swiss banking culture. "It creates a very different environment. The obligation to denounce is based on suspicion. The banker becomes a conduit of justice, which most bankers believe they should not be."

Mr Wyler says the new law could threaten the bank's relationship with a client. "If a client who's been around for a few years with regular transactions suddenly has a few million dollars come into his accounts, and the banker feels there is something fishy, he is obliged to inform the authorities. He has to freeze the accounts and he cannot tell the client. The banker is in an awkward situation."

Opec seeks to raise prices

Alex Brummer

MINISTERS from the leading oil-producing countries last Sunday agreed to cut production in an effort to shore up the price of crude on the global markets.

Under the terms of the deal Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Mexico announced they would work together to reduce output by up 2 million barrels a day, according to a statement issued in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The deal appears to patch up Venezuela and Saudi Arabia's differences.

The Saudis have been critical of Venezuela for exceeding production ceilings, thereby exerting downward pressure on prices. The price of oil producing countries' basket of crudes, which it uses to gauge the market, has fallen to $11.42 a barrel, down from $18.81 in November, when the cartel increased its ceiling by 10 per cent to 27.5 million barrels a day. A similar fall has hit the European benchmark Brent Crude price — although the price that motorists pay at the pumps has altered little.

The sharp fall in the oil price on global markets has contributed to lower inflation among the leading industrial countries and, together with the crisis in Asia, raised concern about global deflation. Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Mexico said that they would co-ordinate with other members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries and non-Opec members. The three nations pledged to cut production by 1.1 million barrels by next week, the Riyadh statement said.

However, the cutback was not a formal agreement to reduce Opec's overall output ceiling or the quotas of individual members.

Saudi Arabia is the largest Opec producer, with a quota of 8.7 million barrels a day, Venezuela's quota is 2.5 million, but it is estimated to be the largest over-producer, pumping 3.3 million barrels a day.

Comment, page 12
Washington Post, page 14



Pope attacks Nigeria over human rights

Alex Duval Smith in Lagos and agencies

POPE JOHN PAUL II ended his three-day visit to Nigeria on Monday with an appeal to the multi-ethnic African nation to leave behind its divisions and work towards unity and peace.

The Pope said that human dignity and rights were a guiding principle in strengthening democracy, and urged Roman Catholic bishops to speak out for justice and freedom.

"The time is ripe for your nation to gather its material riches and spiritual energies so that everything that causes division may be left behind and replaced by unity, solidarity and peace," the Pope said in his address during the official departure ceremony at Abuja's international airport.

The Vatican gave Nigerian authorities a list of around 60 detainees, drawn up with the help of relatives, human rights groups and foreign governments, that it wants freed. The list is thought to include Moshood Abiola, detained after apparently winning the 1993 elections, and leading opposition and trade union leaders.

"Your prayers, blessing and words of advice will inspire us in the pursuit of genuine national reconciliation," Nigeria's military ruler, General Sani Abacha, said in a farewell address. But he made no specific mention of detainees.

Last Sunday the Pope delivered one of the hardest-hitting homilies of his papacy, calling for a crusade for democracy in Nigeria, reinforcing his human rights message and challenging Nigerians to rid their society "of everything that offends the dignity of the human person or violates human rights".

Addressing at least half a million pilgrims in oppressive heat near Onitsha in former Biafra, the frail 77-year-old pontiff launched a thinly veiled attack on Nigeria's military rulers.

"God has blessed this land and it is everyone's duty to ensure that these resources are used for the good of the whole people," he said in a clear reference to the country's oil wealth, which is exploited by foreign companies for the financial benefit of very few.

"All Nigerians must work towards reconciling differences, overcoming ethnic rivalries, and injecting honesty, efficiency and competence into the art of governing," he said. "There can be no place for intimidation and domination of the poor and the weak, for arbitrary exclusion of individuals and groups from political life, for the misuse of authority or the abuse of power.

"As your nation pursues a peaceful transition to a democratic civilian government, there is a need for politicians . . . who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served."

Gen Abacha has pledged a switch to a civilian government by October. Critics believe that by jailing opposition figures, he has simply paved the way for his own election.

Earlier Gen Abacha had set a combative tone as the country prepared for the Pope's arrival. He accused Europe and the United States of meddling in Nigerian affairs by highlighting its human rights record. And at least 30 journalists, lawyers and others critical of the regime were rounded up and jailed.

Kazakhs pay for Soviet nuclear tests

Claudia McElroy in Alma Ata

GULZHAN SMAGULOVA grew up in the 1960s believing that the "earthquakes" which regularly shook her house on Saturday mornings — making the furniture crash and the walls crack — were simply a necessary part of Soviet "research".

Even when her neighbour bore a severely deformed child, and her own mother died prematurely from a combination of chronic health problems, she did not imagine that as many as 500,000 people in and around her home town Semipalatinsk (Semey), in northeast Kazakhstan, were being exposed to radiation.

Now, nine years after the last nuclear bomb was exploded at the Semey testing ground and the veil of cold-war secrecy was finally lifted, she can scarcely believe how little is being done to help the victims of what she calls "a hidden war against our own people". "The test site may be silent, but the environmental and health problems are still massive," she said.

Ms Smagulova, a teacher, suffers skin disorders and high blood pressure, which she believes are due to radiation.

Between 1949 and 1989, 470 nuclear tests, 118 of them above ground, were carried out in the region. The consequences of 40 years of radioactive contamination of land, water and food are hard to measure, but the frequency and fatality rate of cancer, cardiovascular illness and mental illness have increased dramatically.

In the village of Kainar, doctors said that 90 per cent of the 1,029 patients examined between 1992 and 1993 had Aids. The infant mortality rate is said to have tripled, and babies continue to be born with deformities.

The Gorbachev era gave rise to numerous civil and human rights groups, including the Nevada-Semey anti-nuclear movement (named after the main United States and Soviet Union testing sites), founded by the leading Kazakh poet and politician Olzhas Suleimenov.

The movement rallied huge public support, leading to the Semey site's closure in 1991 by President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan.

Yet in a country struggling to cope with post-Soviet economic collapse, social transformation and abject poverty, the government is more concerned with luring Western oil, gas and mineral companies than with the environmental rehabilitation of one of its remotest regions.

"It is not profitable for the state to advertise the continuing crisis of the nuclear tests," said Yuri Kuidin, a veteran anti-nuclear campaigner and photographer, who has just published a book of harrowing photographs of the continuing suffering in the region.

"Even if the government wants to help it can't afford it, so it has really abandoned hundreds of thousands of people," he said. "Nuclear testing is still going on at Lop Nor in China, not too far from the Kazakhstan border, and just last year I saw the same deformities and radiation sickness there."

Russia, which many blame for the tragedy, has its own economic crisis and is reluctant to help. Few international aid agencies appear to have given much priority to the Semey region, some citing the difficulty of getting accurate health statistics and the country's multitude of socio-economic problems.

Armenia poll under scrutiny

Lawrence Sheets in Yerevan

ARMENIA, stung by charges that the first round of its presidential election was badly flawed, now faces a run-off vote next week that could either salvage or destroy what is left of its once-democratic image.

Already under fire for marred elections in 1995 and 1996, diplomats say the strategic but impoverished country is risking international isolation and cuts in crucial aid from abroad if it does not get its house in order this time.

The contest between the prime minister and acting president, Robert Kocharyan, and Armenia's Soviet-era leader, Karen Demirchyan, will also be monitored for any impact on the oil-rich but unstable Caspian region.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, listing a catalogue of abuses, said there were many flaws in the first round of voting last week, in which the front-runners eliminated 10 rivals but failed to get the more than 50 per cent of votes required for outright victory.

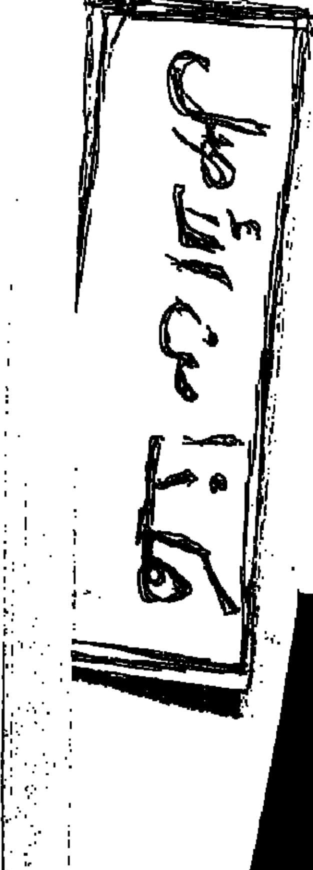
The OSCE said the two men would have faced a run-off in any case but added that the second vote, expected by analysts to be close, must be free of controversy to get foreign approval.

Polls show Mr Demirchyan and Mr Kocharyan running neck and neck, with a large pool of voters still undecided. Political observers fear Armenia has such a bad record on holding elections that a close result will lead to unrest even if the vote is relatively clean.

"A close result will produce a big bang. I'm afraid there could be mass disorder like in 1996," said Artur Baghdasaryan, director of the Armenian Political Scientists' Union. "The victory margin needs to be more than 5 per cent to avoid that," he said.

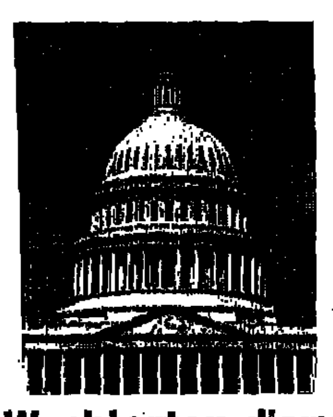
He believed that Mr Kocharyan, whose supporters are accused by foreign monitors of committing most of the abuses, should severely punish those responsible for irregularities or his credibility will suffer.

Observers hesitate to predict the outcome of the run-off. They fear even minor irregularities will call into question a less than clear-cut result, no matter who might commit them. "Regardless of who wins, it will probably be an ugly win, and that means bad things for Armenia at home and abroad," a Western diplomat said. — *Reuters*



GUARDIAN WEEKLY
March 29 1998

Lawyers win in a kiss-and-tell world



Washington diary

Martin Kettle

ADD TOGETHER the gross domestic product totals for Senegal, Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda and Botswana — all being visited by Bill Clinton on his journey through Africa this week and next — and you will arrive at a grand total of $65 billion*.

Now pretend that you are an all-powerful benefactor and double this figure, an act which, were it carried out in practice, would transform the lives of the more than 50 million people who live in these five countries. The total is now $130 billion.

Add another $43 billion to the pot. You now have, at $173 billion, the total amount of money that is transferred annually in civil damages suits and legal fees in the United States.

Legal costs will not be far from President Clinton's mind as he travels through Africa, though not because of this shocking, if somewhat arbitrary, comparison. The reason is more personal. Legal costs and penalties have now become one of the determining aspects of Bill and Hillary Clinton's lives. Not just now, but quite probably until the day that they die.

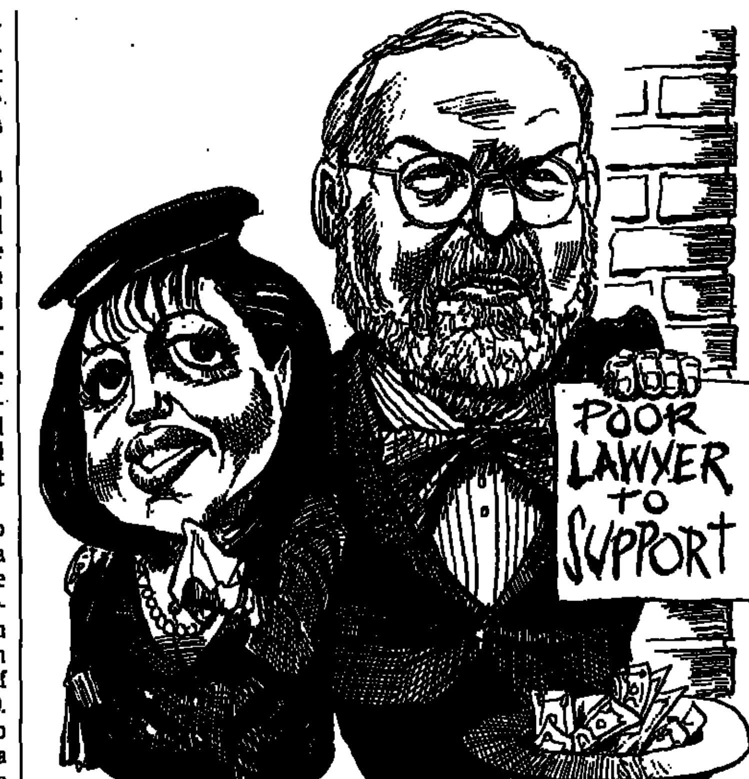
Nobody has managed to compute a figure for the Clintons' private legal costs over the years. All we know is that the amounts are extremely high, and that they massively exceed the Clintons' own assets and incomes. One recent estimate put the lifetime figure of Clinton's private legal expenses at around $8 million, a figure that he cannot hope to pay off from his $200,000-a-year salary as president.

To help to clear his personal debts Clinton will therefore have to rely on his earning power as an author and lecturer after he leaves the White House. The task is probably within his reach. The Clinton memoirs should certainly be worth a million-dollar advance and, as a young ex-president (he will leave office before his 55th birthday) he will have several years of earning potential remaining. Nevertheless, he will live under the shadow of his present legal problems for years to come.

Clinton is also going to have to rely on his proven skills as a fundraiser. At the end of 1997 the Clintons closed down a legal defence fund that they had opened in 1994 and which had brought in $1.3 million over three and a half years in donations capped at $1,000. A new defence fund was opened up in February 1998, after the Monica Lewinsky case broke, which allows donations of up to $10,000 to be made to the president. At the time Clinton was estimated to owe his private lawyers $3.2 million, most of it in fees to Bob Bennett and David Kendall. These men still have much more work to do and many bills to submit before the Paula Jones and Lewinsky cases are concluded.

Whatever else these cases have in store for Clinton, the president knows that he will pay for them, one way or another. But he will only be able to do so because of his earning power and because substantial parts of his legal costs are being met from the public, not the private, purse.

This is an area where the line between public and private has become fuzzy. Clinton's rightwing persecutors are already training their inquisitorial eyes on some of these costs, suspecting that public funds are being used for private purposes. Whatever the truth of that claim — and it applies with at least equal force to the independent counsel, Kenneth Starr — recent rises in expenditure on the White House counsel's office underline the broader problem. The office costs $2.4 million annually, accounting for almost 10 per cent of the White House budget, with 34 lawyers now working there, compared with only four in recent times.



Yet by comparison with his employees and with others who have become caught up in the case, the Clintons are able to survive tolerably well. They can call on White House lawyers for some of their needs, and they at least have a defence fund to help with the purely private costs.

Lewinsky has no such support. Her lawyer, the ubiquitous William Ginsburg, frequently punts estimates of her costs into the public arena. Figures ranging from $100,000 to $250,000 have been mentioned, and these will doubtless climb higher, as Lewinsky has not even gone before the grand jury yet. Ginsburg says he craves a fund like Clinton's, while Monica's father, Bernard Lewinsky, says that he does not have the means to pay for it all — and he is a Beverly Hills doctor.

So, the scale of legal costs almost compels Lewinsky to run to the television studios and the book publishers in the hope of income to pay her bills. The costs of the US legal system not only creates a public demand for kiss-and-tell books but also forces people such as Lewinsky to supply them.

Kathleen Willey, whose accusations against Clinton on CBS television last week were by far the most testing for the White House since the Lewinsky affair broke, is another whose every move is conditioned by her financial obligations. In her case the problem is made worse by her responsibility for debts incurred by her dishonest late husband. Willey's legal costs are approaching six figures, which is why her lawyer was touting her story to publishers for the extravagant sum of $300,000 recently.

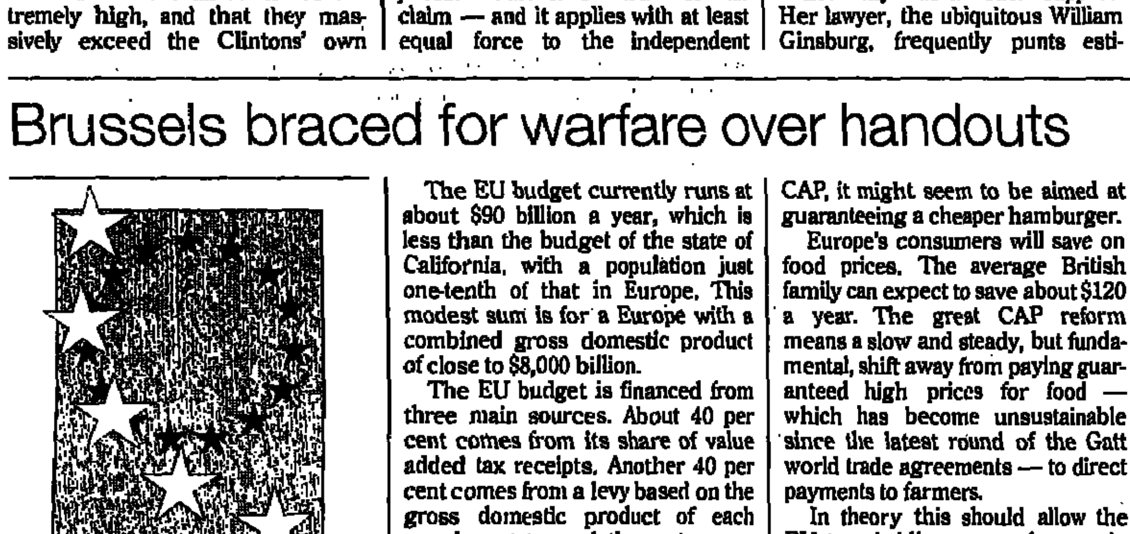
Not everyone in this story can recoup the costs by writing a book. Clinton may be able to do so, as can prominent players such as Lewinsky or Linda Tripp. Jones managed to find the rightwing Rutherford Institute to take on her case and bear her costs. But what about the president's secretary, Betty Currie? Or his valet, Bayani Nelvis? Or his adviser, Sidney Blumenthal? These people cannot seriously expect to produce best-sellers to claw back the money that they are compelled to spend on defending themselves.

In a city where lawyers charge more than $300 an hour for advice, a subpoena from Starr can mean if not financial ruin, at least financial embarrassment. Paul Begala, one of Clinton's top political advisers who was summoned by Starr, says that he has in effect been fined $10,000 for doing his job. A lengthening line of others can legitimately make the same complaint.

Meanwhile Starr himself has spent $30 million — some say $40 million — from the public purse as he probes and explores a bewildering variety of avenues on his multiple inquiries. Even if every cent of it is well-spent on matters genuinely requiring investigation, Starr has an advantage that none of the subjects of his inquiries can match. That is bad enough. What is worse is that he is driving a process which, through no fault of his own, forces its targets into exactly the sort of actions that are liable to make them the subject of investigations in the first place.

* Figures are for 1995, the last year for which comparable data are available

Brussels braced for warfare over handouts



Europe this week

Martin Walker

THIS IS an historic month in Europe. On the last day of March, the negotiations with six new applicants to the European Union from central and eastern Europe, and Cyprus, are to begin. This week the European Commission was expected to issue its verdict on countries qualifying for the fist wave of the single currency. And last week the Commission published its budget plan for the next seven-year cycle, from 2000 to 2006.

The EU budget currently runs at about $90 billion a year, which is less than the budget of the state of California, with a population just one-tenth of that in Europe. This modest sum is for a Europe with a combined gross domestic product of close to $8,000 billion.

The EU budget is financed from three main sources. About 40 per cent comes from its share of value added tax receipts. Another 40 per cent comes from a levy based on the gross domestic product of each member state, and the rest comes from various customs duties.

The money is spent mainly on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), more than 40 per cent; and on the various Structural Funds, more than 30 per cent. The rest goes on EU research projects, training and education grants, foreign development aid and administration.

The budget plan for 2000-2006, in which the EU expects to spend almost $1,000 billion, represents the biggest change in the priorities and spending policies of Brussels since Britain joined Europe 25 years ago. Offering 20 per cent cuts in cereal prices and 30 per cent off the price of beef in its creeping reform of the CAP, it might seem to be aimed at guaranteeing a cheaper hamburger.

Europe's consumers will save on food prices. The average British family can expect to save about $120 a year. The great CAP reform means a slow and steady, but fundamental, shift away from paying guaranteed high prices for food — which has become unsustainable since the latest round of the Gatt world trade agreements — to direct payments to farmers.

In theory this should allow the EU to subsidise poorer farmers in hill country, such as those in the English Lake District or the French Auvergne, so that they stay on the land and maintain the priceless asset of the rural landscape. It should also progressively reduce the subsidies paid to the big ranch-style cereal farms of Britain and France. There will be outrage from the farm lobbies and trench warfare in the Brussels bureaucracy, even though the Commission proposes to spend 10 per cent more on the CAP at the beginning of the seven-year cycle to lull the opposition before the cuts start to bite in the last four years.

The Commission, which for decades watched farm spending balloon and tried to buy public support with lavish "structural" grants, is learning to live within a tightening budget. This discipline began with the 1992 Edinburgh summit, which established a fixed cap that requires spending no more than 1.27 per cent of Europe's GDP.

As a result, Europe's poor regions can expect fewer handouts from Brussels. The EU has begun shifting resources towards the incoming new members of eastern Europe. So the EU is trying to shift from the current generosity, under which 51 per cent of the EU population qualify for Structural Funds, to a leaner system under which only the 35 per cent in the poorest regions qualify.

This is what alarms Northern Ireland and the Scottish Highlands and Islands, who fear that, like parts of Spain, Portugal and Ireland, they will no longer qualify for the most generous "Objective One" Structural Funds. South Yorkshire, however, has been sufficiently hard-hit by steel and pit closures to qualify. A region qualifies for Objective One status when its GDP per capita is 75 per cent or less of the EU average.

It is far from clear whether these Structural Funds work. Brussels likes to point to some success stories, such as the northeast of England, and to Ireland, which gets about 4 per cent of its GDP in net payments from Brussels. But impoverished areas, such as southern Italy or the old coal and iron regions of southern Belgium around Charleroi or the depressed region that used to be East Germany, have shown little improvement.

Still, the member states will fight like tigers for their share. Spain, the biggest recipient of EU funds, has warned that it could block the whole process of enlargement if money is to be taken from its farmers to finance the Czechs and Poles. All sorts of special pleading will now take place as governments try to bend the rules to win a bigger share from Brussels.

The EU's spending restraints are all the sharper since the Commission is having to reserve some $8 billion a year for the new members. In effect the budget expects that enlargement can be financed through the assumed GDP growth of 2.5 per cent a year for the 15 member states.

The new budget now faces a bruising process of haggling by the various national governments in the European Council, and by the European Parliament. Not much will be settled until this year's German elections are over and Germany as the EU paymaster occupies the presidency of the Council next year.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
March 29 1998

Caught in the crossfire

Julian Borger in Qilqis sees Israeli troops wreck a Palestinian family's home

WITH her husband and eldest son in military detention, Zuhur al-Atrash was left to sit among the remnants of her home on Monday and reflect on the vicissitudes of a month under Israeli rule.

At the beginning of March army bulldozers arrived in Qilqis, her home village, and demolished the family house. It had been built without an Israeli permit. Two weeks later, a group of rabbis made their way up the same steep and rocky path the bulldozers had climbed. Watched by journalists, they picked up shovels and helped the family redig the foundations of their shattered home.

Last Sunday a sizeable force of soldiers and policemen arrived to confiscate their tools. They beat Mrs Atrash, her husband Yusuf, their son aged 18 and daughter aged 16. Then they arrested them.

The family have the ill-fortune to live on a hill overlooking a strategic road between Jewish settlements ringing the Palestinian West Bank city of Hebron. With every month that goes by without progress in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, the struggle over territory becomes more pitiless. Demolition orders are hanging over more than 1,000 Palestinian families on the West Bank who live near settlements or roads used by settlers.

Bassem Eid, a civil rights activist who witnessed the arrests, called it "the most brutal incident of its kind I have seen in 10 years". Film footage shows the Atrash family being beaten and kicked ferociously by soldiers and policemen.

Mrs Atrash was knocked to the ground, handcuffed and dragged by her hair so that her shirt was almost pulled off her. "I was shamed and bared. I said I would walk to the jeep myself but they would not let me," she said.

When her eldest son Hussam and daughter Manal came to her aid they were knocked down and beaten. A video recording by a journalist showed Mrs Atrash, still cuffed, trying to shield her son with her own body. Mr Atrash — who had been quoted the previous day singing the praise of the helpful rabbis — was also beaten, kicked and struck repeatedly with rifle-butts.

All four were detained in the police station at Kiryat Arba, the nearest Jewish settlement, and charged with obstruction of justice. The justice in question was a high court ruling last month rejecting their appeal for planning permission.

The reason was the proximity of the family's land to a settler road designed to bypass Palestinian towns, which — under Israeli regulations — requires a security belt on either side. Soon after the ruling the home was demolished, forcing Zuhur, Yusuf and their 10 children into tents. Insisting they had no other shelter, they began to rebuild.

Peter Lerner, a spokesman for the Israeli civil administration, said: "There is no point in building bypass roads if they're no longer going to bypass anything." As for the beatings: "When we arrived we intended to confiscate the tools being used to rebuild the house," Mr Lerner said. "Unfortunately, the householders showed some resistance, which led to the arrests that were filmed."

He said the new foundations and outer walls of the Atrash home, built this month, would be demolished.

After lawyers intervened last Sunday night, Mrs Atrash and her daughter were released. Mr Atrash was offered freedom if he signed a document promising not to rebuild his house. He refused, and both he and Hussam were still being held on Monday in a nearby military camp.

"I said we will not build if you can give us a house and have us come live among you," Mrs Atrash said. "They laughed at that."

By Monday evening the Rabbis for Human Rights had returned in solidarity. Arik Ascherman, their head, called the treatment of the family "inhuman — certainly contrary to everything we know in the Jewish tradition". The rabbis, he said, would continue to take part in the reconstruction of the house and stand vigil outside the military jail.

Wedged between two contrary forces in modern Israeli life, the Atrash family have little doubt which is the stronger. Mr Atrash's brother Ahmed said: "The rabbis have words but the soldiers have the guns and all the power."

Cook pushes European role

Ian Black in Damascus

AN UNREPENTANT Robin Cook last week underlined European determination to prod Israel towards a comprehensive Middle East settlement when he called for an unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon.

The British Foreign Secretary's remarks in Beirut came in the wake of his stormy visit to Israel and angry accusations by senior Israeli officials that his meeting with a Palestinian official at the disputed Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem had breached the terms of the visit.

Snow greeted Mr Cook in Syria and Lebanon on the final stage of his Middle East trip. But there were warm words for British and European diplomacy in Damascus and Beirut, where both governments seek movement in the long-stalled peace process.

With that aim in mind Mr Cook said he wanted to see the implementation of UN Resolution 425, 20 years old this month, which calls for Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon.

"We would also like to see it implemented in the context of a comprehensive settlement which would enable progress on the peace process for all the tracks, not just one track. I wish to make sure that all sides can live in security," Mr Cook said.

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Railtrack bids for Tube deal

Keith Harper

RAILTRACK last week emerged as the strongest contender to take over the London Underground (LU) after the Government announced an extra "patch and mend" £365 million to keep the network intact for two years.

Railtrack said it was in a better position than most to take part in a £7 billion contract to run the network within two years because two-thirds of the Underground's tracks were adjacent to its own. "We have the expertise but we might want a contract longer than the 15 years wanted by the Government," said a spokesman.

Railtrack was responding to a commitment by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, to enter into partnership with the private sector to refurbish the Underground. Mr Prescott described it as "the third way" between privatisation and nationalisation.

The network has suffered from underspending by both Labour and the Tories, who slashed £700 million off its budget six months before the last general election.

Mr Prescott hopes there will only be one contractor, but there could be up to three. They will take over financing of the £7 billion project and will not be restrained by annual public expenditure plans.

He did not rule out a continuing subsidy, but said that LU could break even in the next five years. The private companies will charge LU for access to the network. They will be able to borrow large sums for investment against guaranteed government contracts. When the 15-year contracts run out, they will be returned to public ownership. The companies will be subject to an "agreed performance regime" and to "stiff penalties" if services fall below agreed standards.

The scale of the project is vast, and large sections of the system may be closed for long periods for engineering work.

Meanwhile the first move to return the railways to the public sector was proposed last week by an influential committee of MPs, backed by the Tories. The plan, to which Mr Prescott is likely to give serious consideration for his transport bill in the autumn, suggests that the Government could take an equity share in Railtrack and, where train operating companies are failing, hand the franchise back to British Rail.

The report proposes that British Rail, which still exists as a shell company, could be invited to operate any rail franchise where the operator had failed. The authority would seek tougher quality targets, and impose quick and effective penalties if they were not met. It would make sure that Railtrack kept up its investment programme and, administer public subsidies.

Passenger complaints about poor rail standards shot up by a record 155 per cent between October and December last year.

In Brief

TONY BLAIR was rebuked by a powerful committee of MPs for failing to declare a free visit for himself and his family to the 1996 British Grand Prix.

OXFORD and Cambridge colleges will lose about £12 million of the subsidies supporting their tutorial system for undergraduates under plans to bring the two universities into the mainstream for funding.

JAMES TAYLOR, a consultant surgeon who carried out a heart procedure on a girl of six without the consent of her parents, was suspended for six months after being found guilty of serious professional misconduct. The girl subsequently died.

SUPERMARKETS have been accused of profiteering at the expense of their poorest customers' health by selling cheap unlabelled own-brand cigarettes that are higher in tar and nicotine than most well-known makes.

HOSPITALS have been urged to tighten their procedures after a report revealed that patients being given the wrong blood accounted for almost half of all transfusion complications.

INSURANCE premiums for home-owners on the east coast of England could soar after new research revealed increased threat of flooding as a result of global warming.

THE Government declared open warfare on plans by the European Commission to cut aid for Britain's poorer regions by up to £500 million a year.

NEW research into the causes of cot death suggests that the low oxygen levels at high altitudes and in airliner cabins may put some babies at risk.

ONE in eight sixth-formers from working-class backgrounds say they cannot afford to go to university because of rising costs and the abolition of grants, according to a Mori poll.

ROSALIND Mitchell, the first local councillor to undergo a sex change while holding office was thrown out of the women's meeting at a Labour group because the women decided she was still a man.

THE LORD Chief Justice and the Master of the Rolls have demanded that paedophiles be provided with proper accommodation on their release from prison, to minimise the risk to society and to protect them from being hounded by the public.

GREAT Train Robber Ronnie Biggs is in "good spirits" in Brazil despite suffering a stroke that left him unable to speak.

Trade unions fight for rights

Seumas Milne

THE prospect of outright confrontation between Tony Blair and the trade unions opened up last week after the Transport and General Workers' Union said it would seek an emergency TUC congress to mobilise opposition if Mr Blair's plans for union recognition rights favoured the employers.

The move — spearheaded by the TGWU general secretary, Bill Morris — follows a hastily arranged meeting last week between the Prime Minister and TUC leaders to discuss fears about the forthcoming Fairness at Work white paper.

Although both sides described the discussion as good-natured, there is concern among union leaders that Mr Blair is preparing to back the Confederation of British Industry against the TUC over how to implement Labour's manifesto commitment to union recognition where more than half a workforce wants it.

The first specially convened congress for more than 20 years, targeted at a key part of the Government's programme, would be likely to become a watershed in relations between Labour and the unions.

Mr Morris said that the white paper would be "fundamental in terms of workers' rights, and judgment should be made by the full TUC, not just the 51 members of the General Council". His union wanted the "recall of congress to determine whether or not the trade union movement can support the Government's proposals".

Some union leaders believe Mr Blair is prepared to water down the union recognition commitment to the point where existing union workplace agreements could be undermined. TUC anxiety has been heightened by Mr Blair's decision to oppose European Union proposals for employee information and consultation at national level.

One crunch issue is whether unions will win the right to be recognised for collective bargaining if they win a majority of those who vote in a workplace ballot — or, as the CBI wants, a majority of those eligible to vote. A third option being considered would be to impose a minimum threshold turnout.

The CBI also wants to exclude all firms with fewer than 50 employees, outlaw industrial action around union recognition disputes and leave it to employers to decide which groups of workers should be balloted.



GEC severs link with disgraced Aitken

David Gow

GEC, Britain's largest defence contractor, is to sever its links with Jonathan Aitken, the disgraced former cabinet minister, weeks after giving him a lucrative consultancy on prospective arms sales to the Middle East.

The loss of his first confirmed income since the collapse of his libel trial against the Guardian and World in Action last June was the second blow last week to Mr Aitken, who is already faced with an unpaid £2 million legal bill.

On Tuesday of last week he was arrested and questioned for four hours at a London police station in connection with allegations of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice — the day after his daughter, Victoria, and close friend and business associate, Said Ayas, a Saudi Arabian, were arrested in connection with the same allegations.

GEC said: "Jonathan Aitken is not a GEC employee. He is working with us on a short-term project which is almost complete."

The company refused to comment on the nature of the project but analysts said it was almost certainly to report on arms sales prospects in Saudi Arabia, where GEC's presence is weak.

Mr Aitken's arrest proved deeply embarrassing to GEC, whose Marconi defence equipment and electronics unit had hired him because of his close contacts with the Saudi royal family and extensive knowledge of Middle East arms markets.

Lord Simpson, GEC's managing director, intervened to sever the links with Mr Aitken, aged 55, after being advised that Marconi's initial response — that it was premature to comment on Mr Aitken's position — was damaging the company's reputation.

Hounded Robinson to move in Blair reshuffle

Michael White and Larry Elliott

TONY BLAIR is planning to use his first reshuffle to move the Paymaster General, Geoffrey Robinson, to a transport job in an attempt to find a less high-profile role for a minister who is still being hounded over his tax-free offshore trust.

The move has been forced by non-stop Tory attacks over his family's £12.5 million, Guernsey-based Orion Trust. Downing Street believes Mr Robinson has not been guilty of any wrongdoing, but recognises that the relentless campaign has made it all but impossible for him to stay at the Treasury.

The move would mean that his role as the mastermind behind the Treasury drive to improve public/private financial co-operation — through the Private Finance Initiative — would be deflected away from taxation and focused on helping the mega-ministry of the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, to revitalise public transport.

The move would mean demotion or the sack for Gavin Strang, Mr Prescott's No 2 at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the object of a whispering campaign by some MPs. Unlike Mr Strang, Mr Robinson would not be in the Cabinet.

Though the Prime Minister is thought to be satisfied with the performance of most of his senior colleagues as the first anniversary of his government approaches — on May 1 — MPs' attention is turning towards a shake-up before the summer recess.

Since the Commons revolt over lone parent benefits, persistent speculation at Westminster has predicted the replacement of Harriet Harman as Social Security Secretary, almost certainly by Alistair Darling, Gordon Brown's Blairite deputy at the Treasury.

Some pro-Harman MPs are now saying the Prime Minister should give her another senior post, possibly as minister for women, inside the Cabinet.

Sinn Fein returns to talks turmoil

Rory Carroll

NORTHERN Ireland politicians returned to peace talks on Monday and stopped bickering long enough to agree on one thing: hopes of a deal within three weeks were too optimistic.

Major differences over cross-border bodies, policing and arms decommissioning surfaced soon after the parties sat down at Stormont for what is supposed to be the climax of the peace process.

Unionists and Sinn Fein accused each other of posturing, but government ministers insisted a settlement could be reached in time for a referendum in May.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) picketed Castle Buildings at Stormont as Sinn Fein arrived for the first time in a month following its suspension because of two killings attributed to the IRA.

Unionist leader David Trimble said Sinn Fein was not committed to the process but that an agreement without them could be made between his party and the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), a claim rubbished by rival unionists who said that John Hume would not break with Gerry Adams, the Sinn Fein president.

Mr Trimble requested a formal review session of the talks to discuss progress on decommissioning paramilitary weapons — a bugbear issue that ministers thought had been set aside.

He said questions had to be asked after reports that IRA targeting of policemen had reached pre-ceasefire levels and that the IRA, not splinter groups, were behind recent attacks and bomb-making.

The talks may be thrown into disarray later this week if Jeffrey Donaldson, a Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) negotiator, supplies a dossier he says contains fresh evidence of IRA violence. This would breach the Mitchell Principles and oblige the Government to eject Sinn Fein again.

Mr Adams said any deal would fail if it excluded his party. "A partial agreement, a factional agreement, won't work."

Seamus Mallon, the deputy SDLP leader, said there had to be an agreement between unionism and nationalism — not individual parties. Accusing Unionists of becoming "wobbly-kneed" as the day of reckoning approached, Mr Mallon predicted that a settlement would emerge, but only after much difficulty, tedium and apprehension.

Ministers stood by the Prime Minister's claim that a deal was "agonisingly close". Mo Mowlam, the Northern Ireland Secretary, said she remained "stubbornly optimistic".

Ron Davies, the Welsh Secretary, opened discussions by detailing the plans for a Welsh Assembly, a model which the Government hopes may help produce agreement on a Northern Ireland assembly.

The integrity of a referendum, which ministers want set up before the summer's marching season, was undermined by a report that detailed extensive electoral fraud.

The Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee said there was insufficient time to introduce safeguards against multiple registration at the same address, personation and postal vote abuse.

Two-thirds of the postal votes in the Mid Ulster seat narrowly won last year by Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness were said to be questionable. William McCrea, who lost the seat for the DUP, said he was taking legal advice and may mount a legal challenge.

Corrupt police face fast-track dismissals

Sarah Hall

CORRUPT police officers could be ousted within six weeks under a fast-track process in a radical shake-up of complaints and discipline procedures unveiled on Monday.

The burden of proof at disciplinary hearings will be lowered from the criminal to the civil standard — ensuring it is easier for crooked officers to be found guilty.

The double jeopardy rule — whereby officers acquitted at a criminal trial escaped a disciplinary hearing — will be abolished, as will the means of evading disciplinary action by "going sick". Officers claiming to be too ill to attend hearings will be dealt with in their absence. "In practice, it will mean they become miraculously present," said the Home Secretary, Jack Straw.

The reforms, which come into force from next April, follow a five-year consultation and come less than two months after the latest instance of alleged police corruption centring on 12 Metropolitan police officers suspended in January.

They also come in the wake of claims by Sir Paul Condon, the Metropolitan police commissioner, that there could be 250 dishonest officers in his force.

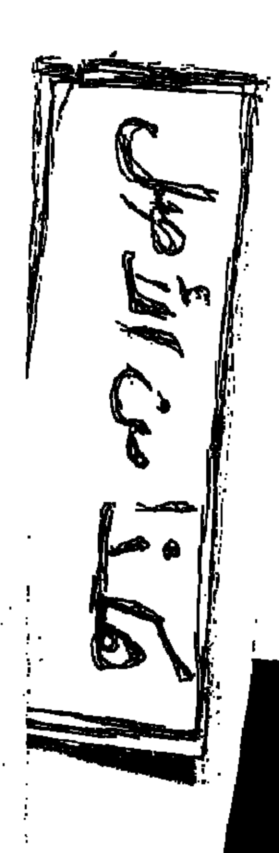
Among the measures will be powers to allow chief constables to sack the worst officers in six weeks, instead of having to go through disciplinary hearings that can last a year.

The shake-up, which goes some way in following the "compelling case for change" outlined in the Commons home affairs committee's report, also brings an end to an officer's right to silence in disciplinary hearings, but allows them to retain lawyers and fails to ensure they are held in public.

Officers convicted of criminal offences connected with their work could have the state share of their pension withheld.

"I don't believe it's right for these officers to go on drawing on pensions at the public expense even while they're in prison," said Mr Straw. "It is abhorrent that public money should be paid out to those very few officers who . . . abuse their position of trust."

The complaints procedure also faces reform, with the Home Office considering whether an independent complaints investigation body could be established.



Church memo calls for radical reform

Madeleine Bunting

THE Church of England is culturally light years behind the rest of society because of its innate conservatism and resistance to change, according to a radical internal memo which urges the adoption of spin doctors and Blairite modernisation for the Church.

The document, written by the Venerable Pete Broadbent, Archdeacon of Northolt, one of the General Synod's most senior policy makers, also says the Synod, the Church's parliament, has become "terminally tedious" and is in danger of consigning the institution to irrelevance.

The adoption of spin doctors and Blairite modernisation would infuriate Church members, who are angry about the hostile coverage they receive and who believe such moves have no theological validity and would compromise the integrity of the institution.

The memo offers a devastating critique of the Church's institutional structures and its synodical method of government. It likens the Church of England to other national institutions such as the Labour party and the monarchy, which either have transformed, or are in the process of transforming, their way of thinking and operating:

"The agenda of Synod will need to be radically reshaped. We are a hostage to fortune on so many issues; our agenda is terminally tedious; we have become a refuge for the pedant, the bureaucrat and the bore . . . much of our agenda panders to the concerns of small minorities." The memo concludes: "It is imperative that we recognise the way in which the whole synodical process can lock us into total irrelevance."

The memo, presented last December to the influential Policy Committee of the General Synod chaired by the Archbishop of York, reveals sharp divisions at senior levels of the Church over the nature and scale of the ambitious internal reform programme that Synod finally approved in February and which will be up and running by the end of this year.

The memo acknowledges considerable anxiety among Church officials and members that democracy is being diluted and accountability weakened in the reform process, known as "Working as One Body".

The memo says the process of change is producing "a lot of resistance". "Some of the concern springs from an innate conservatism and resistance to any kind of change . . . For the Church of England, this poses a particular problem. We are already culturally light years behind the rest of society, partly because we change and evolve more slowly."

Archdeacon Broadbent said: "There may be some people who feel criticised, but we have to have this debate. We can't stay doing things in the same way we did them in the sixties, seventies and eighties. If they see themselves in that description it is their problem. If they think that is criticism of them, then so be it."

But traditionalists criticised the memo. Ann Widdecombe, the Conservative MP who converted to Catholicism over the Church of England's ordination of women, said: "The gospel does not need spinning, it merely needs spreading."



Queue tips . . . Westminster Abbey, where the presence of 3 million visitors a year is damaging the building, has introduced a £5 entry fee in an attempt to alleviate the problem and restore calm to a place of prayer. The £4 million-a-year income will be spent on maintaining the building PHOTO: MARTIN GODWIN

Scrubs prison staff accused of torture

Duncan Campbell

AN INVESTIGATION has been launched into allegations that prisoners at Wormwood Scrubs prison were subjected to "torture" in the form of systematic beatings.

The Prison Service confirmed last week that an inquiry would examine claims that at least eight inmates, and possibly many more, had been assaulted by prison officers.

A dossier made by prisoners at the west London jail and passed to the Prison Service suggested that parts of the prison were "out of control".

The complaints were first made at the end of last year in a letter from the prison to the Prison Reform Trust, chaired by the former home secretary, Lord Hurd.

A prisoner claimed that he had been subjected to serious beatings and suffered major injuries. He alleged his head had been stamped on and bashed against a wall. "He went into very specific detail about his injuries," the trust's deputy director, Nick Flynn, said. The trust was unhappy with the results of initial inquiries, and contacted the London law firm Hickman Rose to pursue the man's claims.

Mr Flynn said: "There appears to have been a conspiracy of silence."

Daniel Machover of Hickman Rose said: "A very reliable source has said that things are out of control. There are allegations of widespread assault on more than 10 prisoners." The allegations in one case "amount to torture . . . We think we have reached the tip of an iceberg."

The firm investigated other claims and passed a dossier to the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham. The matter was then referred to the Home Secretary, Jack Straw.

Many of the prisoners who claim to have been attacked are black. One is believed to be a sex offender. Mr Flynn said some of the prisoners had suggested that they were hurt in ways which would not show their injuries.

Two inmates who made allegations of brutality against officers have been moved. A Prison Service spokesman said that one has gone to another jail, and the other is thought to have been taken to hospital while their claims are investigated by an internal inquiry.

Officials received statements from eight prisoners at the jail who claim they have been assaulted by staff, but names have been removed from six. The two moved are the pair who have been named.

The Prison Service announced that Stephen Moore, governor of Albany prison on the Isle of Wight, will take over as governor of Wormwodd Scrubs next week. The acting governor, Michael Gordon, will become deputy governor.

The prison, which holds almost 1,400, inmates, has not had a permanent governor since last year. The appointment was seen as an attempt to reassure those concerned about allegations of misconduct by prison staff.

Officers at the jail last week walked out in protest at the allegations and the way they have been handled. They returned to work shortly afterwards following assurances from Mr Gordon.

The assistant general secretary of the Prison Officers' Association, Mark Freeman, said officers felt they had not received the support from management to which they were entitled. "The staff felt they were all being tarred with the same brush," Mr Freeman said.

Justice watchdog receives favourable first-year review

MORE than 1,300 cases have been sent to the body set up to review alleged miscarriages of justice in the first year of its existence. So far, 11 cases have been referred back to the Court of Appeal, *writes Duncan Campbell.*

The end of this month sees the first anniversary of the Criminal Cases Review Commission. Its brief was to take over the role previously carried out by the Home Office's C3 department.

The commission, set up while Michael Howard was home secretary, was given the task of examining doubtful cases and making recommendations as to whether they should be reinvestigated by the police, referred to the Court of Appeal or "closed".

Under the chairmanship of Sir Frederick Crawford, former vice-chancellor of Aston university, a team of commission members drawn from the law, industry, local government, the police and academia and with the assistance of case workers, assesses whether cases merit fresh analysis.

Initially, the commission attracted publicity because its chairman had a prominent position in the Freemasons, whose role in the criminal justice system has been under scrutiny by the Commons home affairs select committee. Sir Frederick is no longer listed as holding the same senior post in the Masons.

The latest figures from the commission show that 1,304 cases have been sent for review. Of those, 220 are being worked on and 785 are "open". A total of 299 have been completed.

The 11 cases referred to the Court of Appeal are: Danny McNamee (conspiracy to cause explosions); John Taylor (burglary); Mahmood Mattan (executed for murder in 1952, conviction posthumously quashed on appeal); Derek Bentley (murder); Patrick Nicholls (murder and robbery); David James (murder); George Twitchell (manslaughter); Raymond Cook (aggravated burglary); Mary Druhan (two murders); Clovis Gerald (grievous bodily harm); and Michael Gilfillan (murder).

Civil rights campaigners, lawyers and researchers into cases of alleged miscarriage of justice have broadly welcomed the commission although reservations have been expressed about whether there are sufficient funds available to deal with such a large caseload.

Ministry unable to trace cattle at risk of BSE

Oliver Tickell and Paul Brown

MORE than 49,000 cattle at risk of developing BSE (mad cow disease) are untraceable, according to internal Ministry of Agriculture documents. A further 45,000 suspect cattle are considered traceable, but are proving hard to track down, having been sold on from the herds into which they were born.

The missing cattle are part of the total of 140,000 which Britain promised the European Union it would slaughter as part of a "selective cull". The cull was to wipe out animals from the same stock as those that had already died of the disease and were felt most likely to be infected.

"Tracing is time-consuming and difficult," the memo says. The document reveals that farmers have been breaking the law by failing to keep a record of cattle movements.

That lends credibility to the evidence given last week to the official BSE inquiry by food scientist Professor Richard Lacey, who said that farmers were by-passing the rules which meant they had to report BSE and bury carcasses.

The ministry says it has done its best to find and destroy the cattle. But the memo says: "Other member states who recall that we were unwilling to undertake the cull may be suspicious. They might ask whether we had done all that we could to trace animals."

So far 63,000 suspect cattle have been slaughtered under the selective cull, 12,000 have been identified but not yet killed, and 152,000 cattle that would be eligible for the cull have already died or been slaughtered for other reasons.

Ministry officials discovered poor records not only from 1989/90, when record-keeping was voluntary, but also in subsequent years when good record-keeping was required by law. Out of 2,717 BSE-affected herds visited by inspectors, 256 "did not have good enough records on which to base a decision to slaughter animals".

While the ministry has looked for ways to speed up the tracing, it has concluded that the task will take about six months to complete, and that valuation and slaughter will take another two months.

Brown's Budget aims for a grand coalition

Larry Elliott and Michael White

THE CHANCELLOR, Gordon Brown, offered a helping hand to the working poor while reassuring Middle England last week when Labour's first full Budget in 20 years heralded radical reform of the welfare state and a concerted attack on poverty.

Despite a shake-up of the tax and benefits system based on an American-style tax break for those on low incomes, Mr Brown's package carefully avoided measures that would have jeopardised the electoral coalition pieced together by Tony Blair in his landslide victory last May.

Concessions were made to wealthy savers, universal child benefit was increased and left untaxed for the time being, and mortgage interest relief was spared from the axe as the Chancellor outlined measures to "make work pay".

The Prime Minister's lobbying for the new Individual Savings Account to spare those who had already built up a nest egg of more than £50,000 in PEPs and Tessas was heeded by the Chancellor, while it was also thought unwise to abolish tax relief for homeowners at a time when the married couples' allowance was being reduced to pay for a £2.50-a-week increase in child benefit.

Mr Brown's long-awaited Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) was buttressed by extra help for childcare in the form of a special allowance and a re-shaping of national insurance designed to make low-paid workers more attractive to employers.

Describing the Budget as "prudence with a purpose", the Chancellor sought to put flesh on the bones of the Prime Minister's call for Labour to occupy the "radical centre" of politics with a four-part programme designed to build a national economic consensus.

Mr Brown said an "unshakeable commitment" to tough monetary and fiscal rules had to be combined with measures to promote enterprise, welfare reform and strong public services.

In a clear bid to rid Labour of the last vestiges of its reputation as an anti-business party, Mr Brown pushed through a cut in corporation tax, introduced a two-tier capital gains tax to discourage short-term investment and offered tax breaks for venture capitalists. "My message to business is this: when you are ready to start out, start up, start investing or start hiring — this government is on your side."

The Chancellor's 63-minute speech restated his determination to end the poverty trap that sees some poor families lose more in benefit than they gain in pay. "I say to those who can work: this is our New Deal. Your responsibility is to seek work. My guarantee is that if you work, work will pay," Mr Brown said.

The Chancellor's tough but tender approach was reinforced by some extra money for the Government's priority areas for higher public spending: education, health and public transport, financed by an underspend in other areas.

Labour's determination to hang on to its support in those rural areas where it unexpectedly triumphed last May was highlighted with a £50 million rural transport fund.

The increase in child benefit and a £2.50-a-week increase in child support for those on income support and family credit with children under 11 were designed to erase the bitter taste left by the Government's controversial decision to axe lone parent supplements last November.

There was some bad news for the better off, however, with the Chancellor committing himself in principle to taxing child benefit for higher-rate taxpayers and increasing stamp duty for higher-priced houses sold for more than £250,000.

Tax loopholes exploited by offshore trusts will be curbed, raising up to £1.5 billion on some estimates.

Mr Brown piled extra taxes on traditional targets such as cigarettes, alcohol and petrol. Company cars were again clobbered, but vehicle excise duty will be frozen, and will be cut for small cars with least polluting engines.

The Tory leader, William Hague, denounced the Budget as a "step-by-step betrayal" of Blairite election pledges that would eventually hurt jobs and growth.

Treasury sources said the package would be neutral, with the £2.8 billion cost of the WFTC and the national insurance changes balanced by higher fuel duties, the increase in stamp duty, higher duty on diesel and the closure of tax loopholes.

● Concern in the City that not enough fiscal pain had been imposed on consumers saw the pound soar to its highest level for nine years on foreign exchanges last week. Mr Brown insisted publicly that the cost of borrowing was a matter for the independent central bank alone, but he made it clear that his Budget did not give the Bank the green light to put up base rates.



Budget highlights

New Working Families Tax Credit from October 1999: The key part of plans to make work pay more than benefit. Families with at least one full time worker guaranteed an income of £180 a week. No income tax until earnings reach £220.
Childcare tax credit: Covers a maximum 70 per cent of childcare costs up to £100 a week for a first child, and £150 for two or more children. Designed to make work attractive for parents on WFTC who were previously excluded from the labour market by childcare costs.
Child benefit raised: Uprated by inflation plus £2.50 a week, funded by restrictions on married couples' allowance.
Unemployment: £75-a-week subsidy for employers to take on long-term unemployed. £50 million to help homeless young people into jobs. £100 million to help tackle skills shortages.
National Insurance: No contributions on earnings below £81 a week from next year.
Transport: An extra £500 million for public transport, including a £50 million rural transport fund. Car licence fees frozen this year, cut by £50 for small "clean cars" next year. Licence fees for buses and lorries to be cut by £500. Unleaded petrol up by 4.4p a litre, leaded by 4.9p, diesel by 5.5p a litre.
Sin taxes: Cigarettes up by 20p a packet from December 1; 1p on a pint of beer, 4p on a glass of wine from January 1. Duty on spirits frozen.
Education and health: An extra £250 million for education; an extra £500 million for health.
Business: A 1p cut in corporation tax and a similar reduction in the small companies tax rate. Advance corporation tax abolished. First year capital allowances for small and medium sized firms increased. A £50 million venture capital fund for universities for investment in innovation.
Rethink on Individual Savings Accounts: Existing holders of Personal Equity Plans to keep accumulated savings free of capital gains tax.
Charity: The Government will contribute up to £40 for every £100 donated to Third World charities.
Tax loopholes: Plans are to be brought forward to close a number of tax loopholes, including offshore trusts.

Labour goes to work on a new ideology

COMMENT
Hugo Young

GORDON BROWN'S first full Budget would show, said Tony Blair, what New Labour was all about. From it we learn that New Labour is all about work, work and work, with fairness and aspiration thrown in. The providers of work are equal with the takers, and the Government's main task is to encourage both sides to play their allotted role.

In an hour of utmost earnestness, Mr Brown showed the dedicated imagination that he has been training for years to apply. Work has acquired ideological status. Ask what has replaced equality in the party bible, and you have your answer. It was a profound, rooted performance, just as much so — but how very different! — as the last time a Labour chancellor delivered his first Budget after the wilderness years.

In 1974, reaffirming the politics of the left, Denis Healey's speech — according to his memoirs — "was received with rapture by the Labour movement as representing the first step in that 'irreversible transfer of wealth and power to working people and their families' which we had promised in the election".

This time the promise is to non-working people, and there is no such thing as the Labour movement to register its feelings. The Blair-Brown world unveiled last week is about work of the people, by the people, for the people, as long as the people are defined to include every class of earner and provider across the income scale.

The Budget was about incentivising the whole of society, irrespective of class. It was from the Labour — sorry, New Labour — benches that the first growl of approval was heard when Mr Brown announced the reduction of corporation tax and assorted similar pro-business measures. This had come to seem an entirely natural response, such is the speed with which this government has associated itself with the business imperative.

There was not a single sop to the vestiges of opinion still surviving from the Healey era. The enormously important tax credits to be given for childcare and the radical enhancements for the relief of low-paid working families are a social statement for the modern era, not an obeisance to old gods: all about equality of entitlement to work, nothing about equality of wealth or earning or ownership.

Another way of putting this is to say that New Labour is all about encouraging aspiration, however lowly, rather than cushioning underprivilege, however chronic. This is what the welfare-to-work schemes in the Budget persistently home in on, and, along with the new money for public services, is what distinguishes the philosophy of this government from John Major's. The schemes have been conjured up with passionate enthusiasm, the money for health and education handed out by real believers.

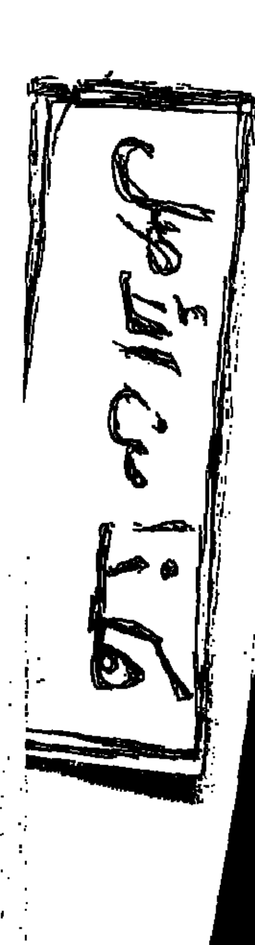
The New Labour ministers are, however, cautious about trusting themselves. The memory of 1974 obsesses them as a lesson in the catastrophe of profligate spending, which then has to be grabbed back when the economy turns down. As a cage to confine them, they have therefore invented their 10-year fiscal plan, a domestic stability pact that is supposed to restrain spending. It's the second of the expedients that subcontracts their freedom — and the fate of their new ideology.

For no incentives to work, however imaginative, will work if work itself does not exist. And this is now contingent on another body than the Treasury, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Bank of England, which will make its own judgment on the Chancellor in deciding whether to raise interest rates, thereby affecting, perhaps decisively, the level of the pound, therefore exports, therefore work itself.

It is extraordinary to listen to a Budget, traditionally the key moment of economic management, that makes no reference to the vital question of the hour. Not a word about either the interest rate or exchange rate. This makes one see this moment in a different light: as a long-term social pattern-setter more than an immediate economy decider.

In the short term the Chancellor is more accountable to the MPC than the MPC is to anyone. If the hawks secure a majority on the MPC, the ideology of work will take a beating. It is also at risk from the actual functioning of the incentives that will be put in place. The small print has yet to be thoroughly declared, and the behaviour of unworking people, presented with new marginal changes in the possibilities open to them, will only disclose itself over time. Reports on the welfare-to-work schemes over the last few months are patchy. The schemes call for collaboration, as well as hard-headedness, from the providers as much as the takers of work, and this philosophy — the very core of what Blair-Brownism most passionately believes in — has yet to penetrate every part of society.

Mr Blair and Mr Brown have put their faith in the belief that people can be made to want to work. But they don't control all the circumstances that make work, and can't guarantee who will be distrusted in four years' time.



The new tsar has spoken

BORIS YELTSIN's dismissal of his entire government on Monday is a sweeping act with only a small bearing on Russia's future. Coming just a week after renewed speculation about his health, it demonstrates that he is in charge, but it does not follow that he is acting wisely. This exercise of presidential power can hardly inspire confidence: most observers on Monday were whistling hopefully in the dark — or holding their breath.

Mr Yeltsin's action is constitutionally legitimate, but only on the one-sided terms that he forced through in 1993 after the Moscow "rebellion" and the murky shelling of the White House. Mikhail Gorbachev could not have done it: Brezhnev would have had to persuade his cronies first: Khrushchev might have tried to convince the Central Committee — and would have failed. But in post-communist Russia, Boris is tsar.

What Mr Yeltsin has done will certainly have significance for the fortunes of Russia's ruling élites — the corporate clans headed by the Moscow barons. But speculation about which banking or industrial sector will benefit is premature. The impact on the reform process is even more obscure.

The financial crisis in East Asia set off a collateral shiver of fear that it would push Russia more deeply into economic troubles. Some slender indicators seemed to show that the Russian economy was beginning to pick itself up out of the very deep hole into which it had sunk. The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predicted a small increase in gross domestic product for 1997, after seven successive years of decline. Russian officials themselves blamed East Asia for a renewal of difficulties. It may have made things worse, but there are other ominous signs: a sharp rise in interest rates, which increased the cost of government borrowing, and the diminishing likelihood that Mr Yeltsin could fulfil his promise to pay back wages to all state employees by the New Year.

In his televised address on Monday Mr Yeltsin said that some economic changes had been achieved but acknowledged that "people do not feel the changes [are] for the better". He called for new dynamism and initiative to bring about "a powerful spurt in the economy". The country needed a "new team" that was "less involved in politics". His call might carry more conviction if Russia had not had a succession of teams, picked and then sacked by Mr Yeltsin. Anatoly Chubais, the first deputy prime minister removed on Monday, has already been in and out of office twice. Mr Yeltsin's words might conceivably have some effect if they struck a popular chord with sufficient resonance to shame and intimidate the mafia and the barons. Somehow the passive support of the Russian people for a strong man in the Kremlin survives adversity even as social services continue to decline while mortality rates are rising. But the Russian people are unlikely to take to the streets to launch a revolution against privilege, corruption and crime. They will wait for the new civil government promised by Mr Yeltsin without great expectations. We would be wise not to expect too much either.

Whistle-blowing on Jerusalem

IF DINNER with the prime minister was the only purpose of Robin Cook's visit to Israel, then the British Foreign Secretary made a mess of it. But the symbolism of sharing food with Binyamin Netanyahu is only one factor in the difficult diplomacy surrounding the peace process, in which Mr Cook has now intervened on behalf of the European Union. If this process had not ground to a halt since Mr Netanyahu took office, then tact towards his Israeli hosts might have had a higher priority. And if the issue of renewed Israeli settlement building — that former prime minister Yitzhak Rabin had sought to stop — were not one of the principal obstacles towards progress, then it might have been wiser not to insist on visiting Har Homa. But the reality is different: Mr Cook's visit has put it in the spotlight, and on balance that was the right thing to do.

Establishing just what the reality is should start with the map. Israel insists that the Har Homa area is part of East Jerusalem, but this is not a neutral fact. Mr Netanyahu's adviser, David Bar-Illan, said — as if this were a clinching argument — that Har Homa belongs to the "Jerusalem municipality". The implication is that since Har Homa is not juridically in the West Bank, over which the Palestinian Authority already exercises or may in future exercise control, then the issue of settlement building there is even less open to debate. This is a tendentious argument. Har Homa — or Jabal Abu Ghneim to the Palestinians — is halfway to Bethlehem. It is only "in" Jerusalem because after the 1967 war Israel established a new Greater Jerusalem which has nearly tripled the city's size. (If the stage is ever reached when the future status of East Jerusalem can be discussed, this will be a hugely complicating factor). Salah Ta'amari, the Palestinian whom Mr Cook met there last week, represents Bethlehem on the Palestinian Liberation Council. He had every right to be there — and to shake hands.

Israel suggested that Mr Netanyahu was the winner in the row. But even on his recent European tour he only paid lip service to the notion of a European mediating role. He believes that the EU is pro-Palestinian which, by Israel's standard of judgment, is indeed the case. The EU is welcome as a payer — it is the largest donor to the peace process, having contributed $2 billion dollars to it since 1993 — but not as a player. The United States, which is still seen however reluctantly as a mediator, is more apt to obey the injunction "don't mention Har Homa". Mr Cook, with the full authority of the EU foreign ministers behind him, need not be so constrained and can play something of a whistle-blowing role.

This is not to say that Mr Cook got everything right. A compromise reached on the basis of the interpretation of one word — the British pledge that there would be no Palestinian "briefing" — was a bit too tricky. Mr Cook also gave the impression of having been ambushed into laying a wreath to Palestinians killed in the 1948 war — after having declined to visit the Holocaust memorial, which may also have been an error of judgment. But to brand this as a Cook's tour gone wrong is to ignore the real problem. It is the peace process that has gone wrong, and people need to be reminded of it.

The great oil price fall

OPEC'S decision to cut oil output by 1.1 million barrels a day is a timely reminder of the 1970s, when Opec output restrictions quintupled oil prices plunging the world into recession. It also comes as a culture shock since the 1990s are supposed to be about globalisation, free markets and reduced intervention not cartelisation. Whether it succeeds is another matter. It will be some time before we know whether restraint holds and whether other countries increase output to fill the gap. Opec, which controls 40 per cent of world output, was in a panic having seen the oil price drop to $13.22 a barrel last week compared with more than $30 in 1985. At that time pundits thought it would soar to $100 a barrel by 2000. In fact the price has fallen thanks to intensive exploration and — limited — energy conservation.

Low oil prices are one of the factors behind falling inflation across the world — though reactions to the fall have shown sharp contrasts. In the United States a combination of market forces and fierce resistance to higher taxes has sent the price of gasoline down to below $1 an American gallon — the lowest level (allowing for inflation) in history. This is great news for US inflation and leaves customers with more money to spend on other things — but it is hardly a sensible contribution to environmental improvement. In Britain Labour has continued the Conservative policy of raising taxes on petrol by at least 5 per cent more than inflation. The result is that petrol costs as much per litre in Britain as it does per gallon in the US.

What's missing from this process is a genuine link between taxation and the reduction of carbon emissions. Britain's high taxes on petrol historically have been mainly to raise revenue rather than to improve the climate, while in the US petrol consumers pay nothing towards the environmental damage they cause. At the very least America ought to use higher imports on gasoline to reduce taxation elsewhere. If market forces are the only criterion then petrol prices won't rise significantly until world oil reserves have been seriously depleted and when damage to the environment may have become irreversible.

Europe in thrall to the cult of change

Martin Woollacott

THE King of Hanover, Queen Victoria's uncle, wrote early in her reign: "There is no denying that there exists a state of irritation all over Europe, and a reckless thirst for changes, both political and religious." The king was an extreme opponent of reform of any kind, and was incensed, among other things, by changes in the vestments of Anglican bishops. He thought Prince Albert a radical, so what he would have made of Tony Blair can barely be imagined.

It is strange how some of the elements in the European picture persist. Britain still, of course, has a royal family of Anglo-German descent, and changes in established institutions such as the monarchy and the Church of England continue to be resisted, or perhaps these days are more likely to be celebrated. While Britain thinks of recasting its constitutional structures, its neighbours' preoccupation is with the reformation of economic systems, both nationally and through monetary union. This week the British Prime Minister was expected to address the French National Assembly, no doubt on his usual theme of change. There is again, or is supposed to be, a current of reforming social and political ideas moving between Britain, Germany and France.

Certainly, Europe is still in a "state of irritation" and, if not reckless for change, nevertheless accepts the proposition that change is, somehow, good. But change, surely, should be a neutral concept. It can come about as the result of alterations in physical circumstances or in demography. It can follow shifts in moral sentiment. It can reflect or shift the balance of power between classes. It may be the badge of generational takeover, or the mask for personal aggrandisement. Change is the universal currency of politics, which can be spent in a thousand different ways. Yet there is a danger that change, or the pretence of change, dressed in its new verbal clothes of "modern agendas", "flexibility", and the like, could become the mindless big idea of a continent that does not know what to keep and what to lose.

Blair himself has become a symbol of the cult of change. His name is shorthand for any social democrat anywhere engaged in reinvention. But his universality may be something of a myth. The kinds of change favoured by different European societies are strongly related to their historical experience. It is true that those societies are now at an extreme distance from the second world war yet that conflict retains a certain defining function.

France, Germany and Britain have all had to wrestle with a cluster of untruths about their role in that conflict. France had to measure the extent and depth of collaboration, understand its pre-war weakness, and assess Vichy. Germany had to put aside the immediate post-war delusion that Germans were the principal victims of the war, and to attend to the social factors that led to Nazism. Britain had to slowly shed an overblown idea of victory that fed a triumphalist view of its institutions.

Out of these different, painful and gradual confrontations with historical truth come different attitudes. France — to maximise national power by strategic planning and to institutionalise, in the shape of Europe, a partnership with Germany. Germany — to set high standards of constitutional and economic stability as essential objectives and to embed the German project in the European one. Britain — to change the institutions that had at one time seemed the elements of its formula for success, in war and peace, but began to be seen as elements in a formula for failure. This last is the tradition that Blair inherits from a number of predecessors, notably Margaret Thatcher.

Economic failure, particularly in the shape of unemployment, has brought doubt to France and Germany much later than it did to Britain. In Germany the militancy of the unemployed, while far from that apparent in France, is nevertheless growing. The welfare state and the ideal of full employment is of central importance in all three societies. But its political freight is different. In Germany it still has that prophylactic function against extremism, and in France its role as a preventative against angry groups taking their politics on to the street.

So the resistance to change is powerful, even as the managerial élites try to shift the balance of power with labour. Nor is it so easily accepted that one function of politicians is to be guardians of globalisation, getting the best deal they can for their countries — but not to be tied down by overly "rigid" commitments to the workforce, the issue underlying the Labour government's problems with the Trade Union Congress and the French government's difficulties with employers over the 35-hour week.

THE IDEA that globalisation is like the weather is only the modern version of the concept of change as coming from outside — as progress, technology, or the "march of time". In this idea the changes that governments can make are only adjustments. Somewhere between the hubristic idea of total human control of events and this abandonment of autonomy lies a happy medium. The "necessity" for change has been such a bludgeon in European history and has justified so much that was in fact unnecessary, stupid, or tragic that it ought by now to be a principle that its advocacy should always be countered with a very firm "Why?".

This is not conservatism, but common sense. More than 30 years ago, Bill Maitland, the hero of John Osborne's Inadmissible Evidence, caricatured the cult of change in a wonderfully over-the-top speech. "I hereby swear and affirm. Affirm! On my . . . honour? My belief in . . . in . . . the technological revolution, the pressing, growing, pressing, urgent need for more and more scientists, for more and more schools and universities and schools, the theme of change, realistic decisions based on a highly developed and professional study of society by people who really know their subject, the overdue need for us to adapt ourselves to difficult conditions, the theme and challenge of such rapid change, change, rapid change." Yes, indeed.

The Washington Post

Making Time for Africa

COMMENT
Stephen S. Rosenfeld

IT IS THE season for Africa. With the Cold War over and apartheid gone, the continent has receded from high-profile American attention, except when it's on fire. But any American president has national-interest reasons as well as political ones to engage. This is why Bill Clinton is investing a prodigious 11 days of presidential presence in his own trip to Africa.

The results of American participation in what amounts to one of the great international rescue endeavors will help determine some substantial part of Africa's future, and a part of our own.

The United Nations, with 54 mostly poor African members, is organizing to tackle in Africa what it calls the world's primary development "challenge." That formulation might make many people expect a humanitarian appeal. The news is, however, that Africa is no longer coming on as a victim of historical forces asking for alms. It's presenting itself as a region finally ready to take the prime responsibility for pulling itself out of the mire.

Despite its multiple crises and rampant poverty, Africa is a place transformed, UN documents assert. After a decade and a half (1979-93) of collapsing incomes, its growth in the last three years has averaged 4 percent. Last year, 11 countries hit 6 percent. Growth is concentrated in energy and mining sectors that do not directly touch on how most people outside these narrow sectors live. But the turnaround is still notable. It comes despite sizable foreign aid cutbacks and an annual debt repayment of $33 billion, a quarter of total income.

These encouraging results are attributed first to a radical region-wide economic policy reversal. A Republican could be forgiven for calling it the Reagan revolution. The state is loosening its tight economic hold. The elite are abandoning Africa's historical alibi — imperialist and natural victimization — for avoiding tough national decisions. Globalization, with all its uncertainties, is touching Africa, too.

Corroboration comes from a couple of Africa hands — former representative Howard Wolpe, a Clinton Africa envoy, and the Overseas Development Council's David F. Gordon. Writing in World Policy Journal, they detect a "quiet renaissance . . . slowly transforming the African continent." Some countries have become "failed states", but others are moving into democratic and market phases.

The authors grant that the showplaces they cite — Ghana and Uganda — are still not back to where they were 25 years ago. Think about that. But their progress is invoked to show that African decline, far from being inevitable, is reversible, and that "there is nothing inherently 'dysfunctional' about African culture — even in ethnically diverse settings."

Here the authors are speaking for many people concerned and knowledgeable about Africa. They are troubled less by the African condition than by the negative post-Cold War American perception of it. For starters, they fault the press and writers like Robert Kaplan for souring public and congressional opinion by their focus on the disaster countries, AIDS, genocide and runaway population growth, and by their neglect of stories of economic and democratic renewal.

There's too much blaming the messenger for my tastes. Their more interesting critique is of a certain "unconscious mind-set." Ethnic conflicts in the Western world are dignified as expressions of "ethnic nationalism" that can be dealt with. Meanwhile, similar conflicts in Africa are regarded as "tribal" and cultural in origin and as tending to be resistant to treatment. The two writers decry the "Afro-pessimist" claim that foreign aid to Africa is inherently wasteful.

Is Africa unfairly burdened with low foreign expectations? In Bosnia and Rwanda, the United States was for long an equal-opportunity bystander to genocide in both places. Still, how does one explain why U.S. aid to Africa has fallen from $1.3 billion in 1994 to $700 million in 1997? Why is the trade-and-reform African Growth and Opportunities Act so modest in the face of evidence that Africa is becoming a better place to invest? Clinton's trip offers Americans an opportunity to explore contemporary Africa, and themselves.

Dodgers Sale To Murdoch Approved

Thomas Heath and Paul Farhi



MEDIA MAGNATE Rupert Murdoch last week received final approval for a record-setting $311 million purchase of baseball's Los Angeles Dodgers, one more team that has left long-time family ownership to become a piece of a conglomerate. The Dodgers now join other professional franchises that have become "product" to feed into the television networks owned by big corporations.

Bit by bit, Murdoch's Australian-based conglomerate, News Corp., has knitted together an empire unlike any other. The deal approved by baseball's owners gives Murdoch the ability to televise Dodgers games locally, nationally and internationally.

In the United States alone, the Murdoch-owned Dodgers could instantly become a marquee attraction of the Murdoch-owned Fox broadcast network, which reaches 98 million TV homes. The team is also likely to appear on the Murdoch-owned FX cable network (36 million homes), and Murdoch's Fox Sports Net regional cable channels (58 million homes).

The Dodgers may also be Murdoch's — and Major League Baseball's — ticket to the largely unexploited international market and its billions of potential viewers. Murdoch owns satellite TV systems reaching baseball-hungry markets in Latin America, Japan and elsewhere in Asia.

In recent years, several other media conglomerates have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in pro teams to secure programming for their company-owned networks. They include the Walt Disney Co. (baseball's Anaheim Angels and hockey's Mighty Ducks), Time Warner Inc. (the Atlanta Braves and the NBA's Atlanta Hawks), cable TV giant Comcast Corp. (Philadelphia Flyers hockey team and 76ers basketball), Tribune Co. (Chicago Cubs) and cable company Cablevision Systems Inc. (New York Rangers and Knicks). (Murdoch's longtime rival, Ted Turner, who owns the Atlanta Braves through his company Time Warner Inc., cast one of only two dissenting votes against the purchase.)

But Murdoch's growing power, and the general trend it represents, has aroused concern that corporate boardrooms will place the teams' interests, and that of the fans, second to the bottom line. For this reason, the National Football League prohibits corporate ownership.

In an interview in New York last week NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue said the ownership of an NFL team by a media conglomerate or a media owner "would present a conflict of interest in competitive situations."

Murdoch won't be just another owner; his TV divisions pay millions each year to televise baseball games. In addition to the national TV contract Fox holds with Major League Baseball, Fox Sports Net has local cable contracts with 22 of the 30 teams.

"The danger is that you could get someone who's bigger than the league," says Robert Wussler, former head of CBS Sports and Turner Broadcasting System, Ted Turner's former company.

Fox executives dismiss all this, citing the network's track record in covering NFL and baseball games over the past five years. "We have so much money tied up in the sports business as a whole, and frankly to jeopardize our relationship with the leagues to gain some . . . advantage with the Dodgers is laughable," says Peter Chernin, News Corp.'s president.

The presence of big media corporations in sports has already contributed to the huge inflation in player salaries — and further widens the competitive gap between franchise located in small- and medium-sized markets and those in big media centers like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

"It makes everybody's costs go up," said Marc Ganis, president of Chicago-based SportsCorp Ltd., a consultant to several sports teams.

To meet those costs, Murdoch already has mapped out plans to institute many of the modern, money-making techniques that the Dodgers' former owners, the O'Malley family, long resisted.

Chernin said these include building lucrative luxury boxes in Dodger Stadium, adding lighted billboards in the ballpark, adding a retail store, a Dodger hall of fame and an interactive entertainment center along the lines of the National Sports Gallery at the MCI Center in downtown Washington. Murdoch also has the option of raising ticket and concession prices, which have been among the lowest in Major League Baseball.

Russia Says Scientists Helped Iran

Daniel Williams in Moscow

RUSSIAN intelligence agents for the past several years have quietly recruited scientists to go to Iran and teach Iranian counterparts how to build missiles to carry deadly payloads as far as 1,200 miles, Russian and diplomatic sources said.

Russians and foreigners said officials of the Federal Security Service, Russia's intelligence arm, recruited the scientists at Russian technological institutes and weapons factories for work in Iran.

The contracts, however, were negotiated in Iran between the scientists and their hosts — apparently to insulate the security service and the government in Moscow from responsibility. The Iranians paid the institute or factory separately, Russian and foreign officials said.

The Federal Security Service is the successor to the KGB secret police and still oversees Russia's sensitive arms factories and high-technology institutes. The agents, in co-operation with the Foreign Ministry, arranged for the scientists to leave Russia, Russian officials said. As in Soviet times, the government restricts the travel of technicians who possess knowledge of sophisticated technology.

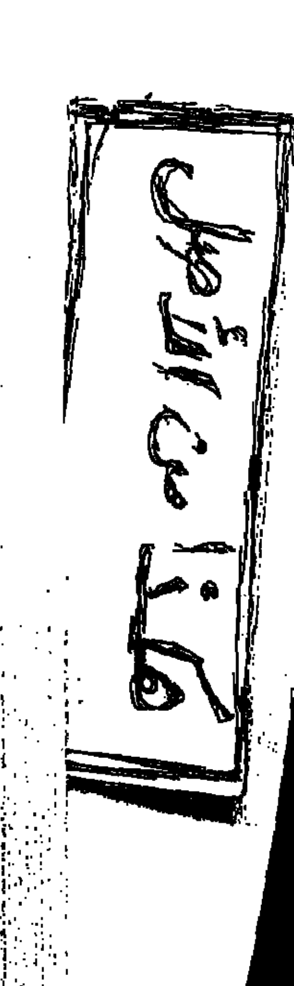
Russia intends to stop recruitment and curb permission for the scientists to travel to Iran, officials said. The curtailment follows a January decree issued by the then Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, who has long denied that it was government policy to transfer missile technology to Iran. He and other Russian leaders insisted that any leakage was purely on a freelance basis — the government did not break the 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime, an international accord that Russia signed and that is supposed to discourage missile proliferation.

The repeated denials have left diplomats and some Russian observers wondering whether the government is able to stop the flow of scientists to Tehran.

"If it wasn't government policy before, then how can they guarantee they can stop it now? If it was government policy, then they were lying before and who should believe them now?" said one Russian official.

If the new policy takes hold, one reason would be Russia's view that the economic gains from technology sales would be outweighed by the possible loss of financial support from the United States and Europe, a Russian official said. Another is the realization that Iran aims to build a missile program that eventually will make it independent of Moscow's help.

The Russians also are reacting to intense American pressure to stop helping Iran build missiles that could hit as far away as Israel and Western Europe, and could be mounted with nuclear warheads.



GUARDIAN WEEKLY
March 29 1998

Fuel injection . . . The world has come to expect abundant cheap oil PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MOORE

Scraping the Bottom of the Barrel

COMMENT
George F. Will

TWENTY-FIVE years ago this October the first "oil shock" supposedly ushered in an era of "limits" and "diminished expectations", small cars and Jimmy Carter's cardigan sweater. Today gasoline is cheaper — less than 80 cents a gallon in some parts of America — than the designer water people sip from plastic bottles while walking to their sport-utility vehicles that are so unfairly safe when they collide with the small cars Americans are encouraged to drive in order to save gasoline.

A gallon of gas costs, in inflation-adjusted terms, less than half what it cost 40 years ago. Yet Irwin Stelzer, resident polymath at the American Enterprise Institute, reports that the daily rate for renting drilling rigs rose 42 percent last year. Oil companies are eager to find more of the commodity they are selling for less because the cost of producing oil has fallen even faster than the price of oil.

One reason is new software that removes much of the guesswork in exploration. And Stelzer notes that, whereas 50 years ago it was considered a marvel to drill in 20 feet of water, drilling soon will be done in 10,000. Stelzer recalls that in 1972, when world reserves were 670 billion barrels, the Club of Rome report predicted exhaustion of the world's oil in 1990. Since then 550 billion barrels have been used, but proven reserves are more than 1 trillion.

Asia's economic boom increased oil consumption there sixfold in 25 years. Today's Asian bust has an aspect helpful to the U.S. economy. Asian demand for U.S. goods and services has contracted, but so has Asian demand for oil, which contributes to declining oil prices. That decline increases the disposable income of American consumers.

The price of oil has dropped more than 40 percent since October, and this month drifted below $13 a barrel. Stelzer believes that the big oil-exporting nations can make money selling at $5 a barrel, and will soon be doing so. This could have a stimulative effect in America equivalent to a tax cut approaching $100 billion annually.

Until oil prices plummeted, it had been an axiom of journalism that all news is economic news and all economic news is bad. That is, a lead lining can be detected on every silver cloud. Rising unemployment? Here comes a drain on the budget, social waste, declining consumer confidence. Declining unemployment? Expect inflationary overheating of labor markets. Rising interest rates? A recipe for sluggishness. Declining interest rates? Look for general overheating.

The task of finding the gloomy dimension of declining oil prices is testing the ingenuity of the Cassandra class. However, Colin J. Campbell, writing in The National Interest quarterly, argues that since 1850, when the world's population was 1 billion, population has increased sixfold and oil extraction has increased in direct proportion. So "the world is using up its geological endowment at a prodigious rate."

Although discovery has become cheaper, discovery rates are falling sharply, and by 2003 half the planet's supply of conventional oil will have been consumed. (Conventional oil is that which is easily extracted. Nonconventional oil is produced, as from Canadian tar sands deposits, which, according to Richard L. George, writing in Scientific American, contain more oil than Saudi Arabia's reserves.)

Campbell says the world is on the eve of a "historic discontinuity", not because it is running out of oil, but because it is running out of the abundant cheap oil on which it has come to depend. Even if Campbell's cautionary strictures are all valid, they mean only that this golden moment cannot last forever. This moment is not simply a gift extracted from a bountiful planet. Rather, it has been produced by scientific creativity that is largely the fruit of freedom in industrialized countries. Freedom is a political, not a natural resource, and America has the world's largest supply of it.

Clinton Relaxes Cuba Sanctions

Thomas W. Lippman

PRESIDENT CLINTON last week decided to allow Cuban Americans to resume sending money directly to relatives on the island and to permit charter flights from the United States in an effort to capitalize on a changed atmosphere in Cuba inspired by the visit of Pope John Paul II.

In addition, the president will instruct the Treasury Department and other agencies to simplify licensing procedures for exporting medicine and medical devices to Cuba and to expedite the processing of license applications.

Senior White House officials described the president's decision as an effort to bolster the status of the Roman Catholic Church in Cuba and decrease the dependence of the Cuban people on state organizations.

President Fidel Castro welcomed the first signs of a thaw in relations with the United States. He told CNN that the U.S. decision to reinstate humanitarian flights was "positive and constructive." He said the move would "help in creating a better climate of relations."

Clinton's decision marks the first relaxation of U.S. policy toward Cuba since Cuban jet fighters shot down two unarmed small planes operated by a Miami-based Cuban exile group in January 1996, killing four crew members.

Officials insisted, however, that the moves do not signal a weakening of the long-standing U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba, which they said remains the cornerstone of efforts to isolate and undermine the communist regime of Castro.

Senior officials said Clinton has the authority to make the changes by executive order and does not need legislation. Congressional action would be required to scrap the embargo because it was written into law in the 1996 Helms-Burton act, which Clinton signed reluctantly after the shootdown of the planes.

Before the shootdown, Clinton said last November that he wanted "to open up with Cuba, to have a gradually evolving relationship" if Castro eased his repressive policies. The relaxation of restrictions announced last week, however, "is a response to what the Pope did, not a response to anything Castro has done," a senior official said.

Advocates of lifting the embargo hailed the decision as a good first step, while anti-Castro hard-liners blasted it as an unwarranted gesture to a dictator who responded to the Pope's visit with a new crackdown on dissidents.

Reps. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Florida, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Florida, both Cuban Americans, said in a statement that Clinton "once again makes clear that he seeks to unilaterally relax sanctions on the Castro tyranny. Rather than providing Castro with the hard currency he seeks, the administration should find ways to seriously and effectively assist the internal opposition in Cuba."

Officials close to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said she took soundings in Florida's Cuban American community during a recent trip to Miami and came away convinced that Clinton could get political support for the changes.

Albright recommended the modifications to Clinton after she met with the Pope in Rome this month. Once implemented, they will substantially reinstate the rules that were in place before the refugee crisis of 1994 and the 1996 shootdown of the planes.

The Pope sharply criticized the U.S. embargo during his visit to Cuba in January. But the premise underlying the president's decision, officials said, is that the visit, the first papal trip to Cuba since Castro came to power in 1959, showed that the Cuban people want and need organizations not controlled by the state to help ease their poverty and political isolation, and that the Church may be prepared to take on that role.

"The Pope's visit has created a different dynamic," a senior official said. "Castro is not going to change, but what is happening here is that there is a desire of the [Cuban] people to expand on the space that has been created" between them and the Castro government.

"What we have to do is sideline Castro as much as possible" by showing Cubans that the outside world cares about them and by encouraging non-state organizations such as the Church to become more active, this official said.

As described by senior officials, who insisted on anonymity, the president's initiative is consistent in motivation with an initiative by the anti-Castro Cuban American National Foundation to send donations of food and medicine to the island through church-affiliated organizations.

Internet Traders Win Moratorium on Tax

Rajiv Chandrasekaran

THE NATION'S governors agreed last week to support a three-year ban on special Internet commerce taxes in exchange for a promise by Congress to consider requiring electronic merchants to collect sales taxes after the moratorium.

The National Governors Association had opposed bipartisan legislation in the House and Senate to enact an Internet-tax moratorium, saying the freeze could deprive state and local governments of crucial tax revenue as electronic commerce becomes more popular. The governors' disapproval threatened to scuttle the bills, introduced by Rep. Christopher Cox, R-California and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon.

Industry groups contend that imposing sales taxes on Internet transactions will slow electronic commerce and make it less appealing to consumers.

After three months of negotiations with the governors' association, Cox agreed last week to revise his bill, reducing the moratorium from six years to three. His bill would set up a "Commission on Internet Commerce" that after the moratorium would propose a system of levying state sales taxes on Internet and mail-order purchases.

The governors want to require Internet and mail-order merchants to collect sales taxes even if they do not have a physical presence in the state to which the goods are shipped. Currently, such businesses are not required to collect state sales taxes if they do not operate in the destination state; purchasers in 45 states and the District of Columbia, however, are required to send the appropriate sales tax to their state treasury, a rule that is largely flouted.

Because there are about 30,000 different tax jurisdictions nationwide, industry groups say that imposing a tax-collection requirement on merchants would create severe administrative burdens.

The governors want the commission to consider setting up a uniform national system of sales tax rules for electronic commerce and uniform rates for each state.

"Our goal is to ensure the system is fair," said Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt, R, who spearheaded the issue for the governors' association. "A person should be taxed fairly no matter where the purchase is made."

Wyden said he would not support the compromise: "This creates a plan that's going to create tens of billions of dollars in new taxes that will clobber small businesses."

President Clinton has expressed support for a moratorium and a commission to study approaches to taxing Internet commerce. Cox emphasized that recommendations by the commission will have to go through the standard legislative process.

Wyden and industry lobbyists also object to a provision in the Cox bill that would allow states and local government to keep existing taxes on Internet access service and commerce. "It guts the whole moratorium," said Jill Lesser, the deputy director for law and public policy at America Online Inc. "It says that if you rush to enact a tax, you win."

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Going From Red Tape to Pink Slips

China's bureaucrats face a massive shakeup, writes **Steven Mufson** in Beijing

FOR 40 years, Chinese civil servants received paltry pay, but their jobs were secure for life. They received evaluations, but 90 percent simply said "satisfactory." The criteria used to evaluate them were not related to managerial prowess, but rather to loyalty to the Communist Party. And in the absence of democracy, their power was often great.

So are their numbers. By one estimate, 60 percent of government revenue went to pay for the wages of officials by the end of 1996. Since 1993, 1 million new officials have been added to the government payroll each year.

Now the sheltered world of Chinese civil servants is about to be shaken. With this month's announcement of the details of a government reorganization, four new ministries will be created, but 15 of the 40 existing ministries will be abolished or downgraded. Hundreds of thousands of China's roughly 8 million civil servants could be fired.

"The incompatibilities of government institutions to the development of a socialist market economy have become increasingly apparent," Premier Li Peng said.

A recently established school for public administration in Beijing already has been trying to rewrite the rules of the Chinese civil service. By enrolling civil servants in short courses taught in conjunction with American graduate schools of administration and government, the Chinese National School of Administration hopes to improve the efficiency of China's mammoth bureaucracy and make public service more than a sinecure or opportunity for corruption.

Courses include market economics for state-owned enterprise managers, and public finance and taxation for provincial governors and deputy governors.

"Whether we can manage this country well or not depends on the quality of civil servants," said Zhang Xiuxue, vice president of the school of administration.

The task is enormous. China is the country that invented the civil service. Its traditions date to the 7th-century Tang Dynasty, and are now overlaid with a Communist Party cadre system that makes most officials answer to party discipline rather than an independent code of public conduct.

Even if the government succeeds in paring back the bureaucracy, the Communist Party's control remains perhaps the biggest obstacle to genuine reform. The party recognizes the need for professional managers for everything from enterprises to patent offices, from tax bureaus to tourism boards. But it is leery of granting too much power and independence to such civil servants.

Improving the performance of the remaining civil servants has more to do with the lives of ordinary Chinese than the nature of the national legislature or the much-discussed village election experiments. "This dimension of political reform is bringing change where it counts most immediately in the daily lives of the average citizen," said Marwyn Samuels, a consultant with the executive education program at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, which is assisting the Chinese administration school.

Some of the school's case studies reveal issues that affect day-to-day governing in China. For example, in the old cadre system, party committees selected civil servants; one case studied a new recruitment system in a bureau that decided to advertise 10 vacancies and interview candidates.

IN SHANGQIU in Henan province, officials tried rotating posts. A police chief brought in from outside the area cracked down on several major corruption cases involving local officials. The city of Qingdao has experimented with ways to dismiss civil servants. It laid off 25 people in 1992, and 52 in 1994 for incompetence. Most had prolonged absences from work, gambling problems or "immoral conduct." Some allegedly had taken bribes.

A typical student at the administration school is Du Yili. Like many Chinese civil servants, the 43-year-old has followed an unusual career path because of China's tumultuous political history. When her school years were interrupted by the Cultural Revolution in 1966-76, Du spent three years as a teacher in the countryside. When universities were reopened in 1979, she studied literature. None of this prepared her for the job she has now in the office of policy and regulations for the national tourism agency.

One issue Du is studying is the rule of law, now much discussed but nonexistent during her youth when ad hoc groups of Red Guards ruled. Before arriving at the administration school, Du had given little consideration to the possibility of being sued. As part of her training program, she went to court and saw a government agency lose a lawsuit. "If we're sued, it could be me standing in court," she said.

Attending the school, said Xie Yanzhi, was "like adding gasoline to a car." He supervises 112 civil servants in the logistics department of Sichuan province. Xie said he studied topics ranging from staff travel allowances to how to separate different administrative institutions. It's been especially helpful for Xie, 45, whose basic education consisted of 2½ years at the Sichuan provincial party school.

Samuels, the Maxwell consultant, compares the Chinese administration school to the establishment of the U.S. Civil Service Commission in 1883 and the end to the excesses of the Jacksonian spoils system.

Samuels said the late Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong tore one page from the Soviet Union and one from the Jacksonians by stressing the "politics first" code for civil servants. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, one slogan was "better red than expert" — and the government apparatus came to a standstill.

When Deng Xiaoping came to power, China culled the ranks of the civil service and began to restore regular government functions. But the effort to establish the national administration school is itself a case study of the problems of dealing with Chinese bureaucracy. Efforts to introduce new civil service standards were interrupted by a purge of party liberals in 1987 and by the violent end to political protests in Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

The appointment of conservative party figures to oversee the school and then a dispute with city officials over land availability further delayed the launching of the institution. Finally, in 1993, the National People's Congress passed a civil service reform law that established the school.

Samuels said that more standardized qualifications for a more professional civil service could reduce corruption. "When the means test for power in China becomes something other than personal connections, China will be on the road toward defining its own more transparent and equitable political system," he said.

"They have to learn how to run a society ruled by law, that isn't corrupt, and where officials have responsibility for the people," added Samuels.

Delegates on their way to a session of the National People's Congress in Beijing last week. Government reorganization could lead to hundreds of thousands of civil servants being fired PHOTO STEPHEN SHAVER

Costa Rica Sees Future as Silicon Valley

Serge F. Kovaleski in San Jose

THESE may be the waning months of President Jose Maria Figueres' administration, but he has not let up in his courting of foreign high-technology companies as part of Costa Rica's drive to become the Silicon Valley of Latin America.

Figueres, for instance, has been conducting meetings with a dozen or so executives of overseas high-technology firms to discuss their experiences doing business in Costa Rica. By all accounts, the efforts reflect the nation's commitment to creating a hospitable environment for foreign investment in this small Central American country of 3 million people.

Accompanied by a team of investment experts, Figueres also visited the United States last month to meet with corporate officers, including Bill Gates of Microsoft Corp.

Costa Rican officials decided 15 years ago to transform the economy from one based on traditional export staples such as coffee, bananas, sugar and beef, to one centered on computer chips and services.

For the first time, according to government figures, Costa Rica is expected to earn more from high-technology exports in 1998 than from bananas or coffee or even its lucrative tourism industry. Buoyed by investment by such companies as Intel, sales of technology goods abroad should reach $1 billion, a three-fold increase over last year's levels — making Costa Rica the largest exporter of such equipment per capita in Latin America.

"This is a country that is at the turning point of its evolution toward integrating into the world economy," said Eduardo Alonso, general manager of the Costa Rican Foreign Trade Promotion Office, which oversees the nation's free trade zone, in which 150 overseas companies operate.

Long considered an anomaly in a part of the world that has been rife with poverty, social chaos and corruption, Costa Rica has used its unique status as a cornerstone of its marketing push to secure foreign investors. After abolishing its army nearly a half century ago, the country has pumped large sums of money into education, creating a highly skilled workforce that reflects a population with a 95 percent literacy rate.

Although funding for such social programs has been reduced over the last decade because of Costa Rica's large internal debt, Figueres recently announced an ambitious plan to provide all elementary and high school students with their own e-mail addresses by the end of this year. The administration is leaving office in May, but funds for the project have been arranged through the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations.

The political and economic stability in Costa Rica has been a big draw for corporations, as has its socialized medical system and the general quality of life in a nation where 93 percent of the inhabitants have electricity.

But many of the low-wage industries, such as textile and garment factories, that fled to Costa Rica during the civil wars that ravaged much of Central America have relocated to El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala because wages in Costa Rica were too high.

Nonetheless, Costa Rica has clearly developed a niche as a technology hub. Executives point out that Costa Rica has been effective in touting the advantages of running complex businesses in a small country, where they have greater access to government officials than in many larger nations such as Mexico, Brazil and Chile.

"In Intel's eyes, Costa Rica showed us the fact that small is beautiful," said Danilo Arias, public affairs manager. The Santa Clara, California-based computer chip giant considered Mexico and a number of other countries before deciding to invest $500 million in a new complex in Costa Rica — the largest investment to date in this nation by a single corporation. Arias added that, "The country has been very clever at looking at itself and evaluating its strengths and weaknesses."

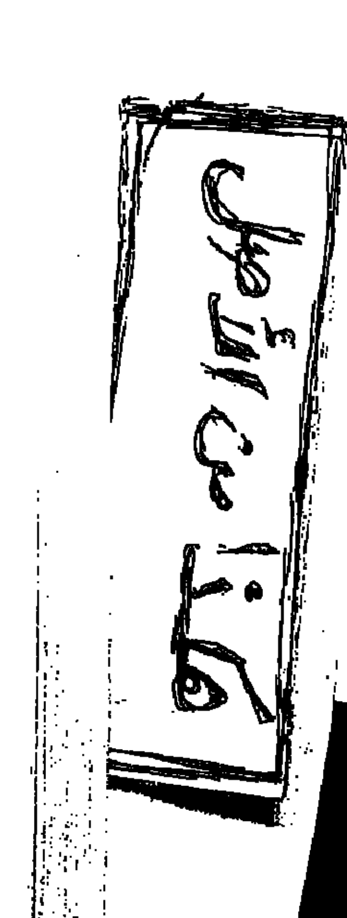
These weaknesses include a pressing need for extensive infrastructure improvements, such as upgrading and increasing the capacity of the country's international airport and seaports, and improving the quality of roads, many of which are in terrible condition, particularly outside of the capital of San Jose.

Furthermore, proposals can get bogged down by minutia, a process that is designed to ensure the integrity of contracts but which can result in frustrating delays.

Corporations have also complained that dealing with Costa Rican customs can be inconvenient because of archaic bureaucratic practices. Executives also say they would also like the government monopolies over telecommunications and insurance broken up to improve services.

The presence of Intel, which will employ 2,000 workers at its two plants here, has highlighted another problem that Costa Rica must deal with: a shortage of qualified engineers that has prompted the educational and business sectors to band together.

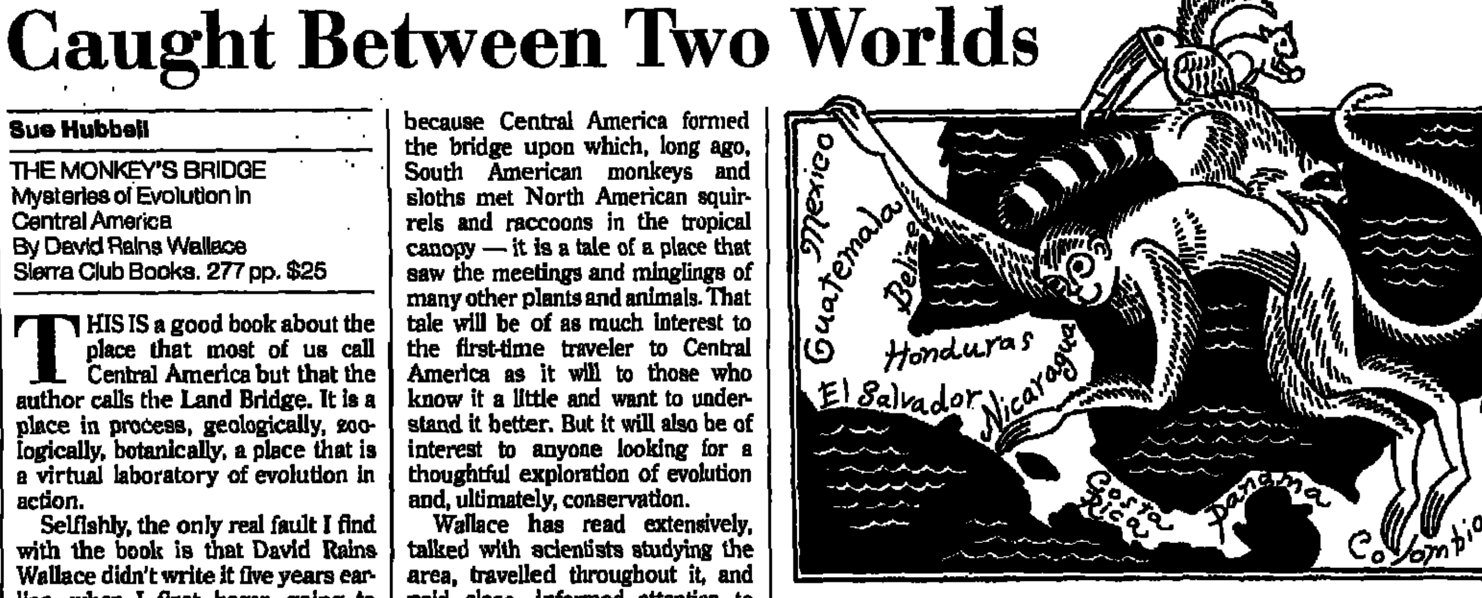
Executives stressed that as Costa Rica looks to the next millennium, it is crucial that the country not become complacent. "You cannot rest on your laurels," said Arias of Intel. "Just because you have a good literacy rate does not mean it will be there forever or that others won't catch up with you."



Caught Between Two Worlds

Sue Hubbell

THE MONKEY'S BRIDGE
Mysteries of Evolution in Central America
By David Rains Wallace
Sierra Club Books. 277 pp. $25



THIS IS a good book about the place that most of us call Central America but that the author calls the Land Bridge. It is a place in process, geologically, zoologically, botanically, a place that is a virtual laboratory of evolution in action.

Selfishly, the only real fault I find with the book is that David Rains Wallace didn't write it five years earlier, when I first began going to Central America, fell in love with it, was bewildered by it. Such a book would have helped me make sense of all I was seeing, hearing, experiencing. Wallace, a naturalist, nicely captures the feeling of bewilderment I had — and he did, too — on his first visit to the rain forest in 1971: "There was a kind of unfathomable deviousness to the forest, a capacity for endless surprise hidden in a veil of leaves so similar in shape, color and texture, as to defeat comprehension."

Wallace brings the reader along and makes him see what he sees, feel what he feels, as when he encounters cichlid fish in a lagoon in Belize that "might have been in a landscape of nine million years ago. There was a Miocene plenitude about it . . . the lagoon was a sheet of shallow water choked with waterweeds . . . Cabomba and water lily flowers rose above the surface, sometimes so thickly it seemed like a meadow. Cichlids swarmed in the weeds, particularly tricolors . . . with magenta bellies. The 'pok, pok' sounds as they struck at surface insects and the squawks of coots and jacanas made the hair on my arms prickle."

Although the book is titled The Monkey's Bridge — apparently because Central America formed the bridge upon which, long ago, South American monkeys and sloths met North American squirrels and raccoons in the tropical canopy — it is a tale of a place that saw the meetings and minglings of many other plants and animals. That tale will be of as much interest to the first-time traveler to Central America as it will to those who know it a little and want to understand it better. But it will also be of interest to anyone looking for a thoughtful exploration of evolution and, ultimately, conservation.

Wallace has read extensively, talked with scientists studying the area, travelled throughout it, and paid close, informed attention to what he found there. He brings the past alive, brings a sense of time to all he describes, makes the reader aware of the history that each animal and plant carries in its genes.

There was a time when the continents were configured differently from now, when South America butted against Africa, when North and South America were separate and unconnected, when much of the land that now makes the land bridge was deep under water. He explains the geological forces that have shaped the present land, draws connections between what we see today and that past.

This is fascinating stuff. For example, as Wallace tells it, somewhere around five million years ago there was great tectonic-plate activity under what is now Central America; new land was thrust upwards, and the sea grew shallower. Around three million years ago, the seaway closed, the land bridge was formed, the two oceans separated, and the animals within them were sent on their own evolutionary ways.

Wallace writes that the formation of the bridge "may have changed global climate catastrophically. Scientists have speculated that seaway closure diverted to the north a major ocean current that had flowed through the intercontinental strait. The diverted current may have become the Gulf Stream, and, as it carried moist tropical air over the North Atlantic, the stream may have greatly increased precipitation at higher latitudes. That in turn may have helped cause the ice ages as increased snowfall accumulated into glaciers."

The connection between the two continents allowed animals to pass back and forth between them and plants to spread with them. But the picture is more complicated than simple passage. Ice ages came and went, plate activity continued, volcanoes continued to erupt. In a very small area, Central America has very high mountains, low swamps, dry uplands. There is enormous variation in rainfall.

All this makes for a great plenty of ecological niches, a bewildering array of habitat. As a result, the author writes, "Central America is so crowded with life that it supports seven percent of the earth's species on less than one-half percent of its land, and those species are an extraordinary mixture of North American and South American forms that have surged back and forth across it for millions of years." Prehistoric pollen adds to the scanty but tantalizing fossil record that Wallace uses to help us understand the complexity of speciation and the evolutionary process with such diversity of habitat.

Aside from wishing I'd been able to read this book five years earlier, I have a couple of quibbles with it. Wallace mentions a lot of unfamiliar plants and animals by scientific name, although he writes for a popular, not scientific, audience. Some drawings or photographs would have made the book clearer. So would have a geological time line. Most of us have a hard time dating the Miocene or the Pliocene or the Cretaceous era without some sort of crib.

In addition, since the text is arranged thematically, Wallace jumps around from country to country, from place to place by local name. I have a stack of detailed maps from Central American travels, but most readers would not, and I read the book with the maps on my lap. My advance copy contained no maps, although the cover text said two would be included; the finished book contained only decorative maps, not good enough in detail to cover the rivers, towns, nature reserves and parks mentioned in order to give the reader bearings.

The Man Who Was Egypt

Susan Dooley

ONE OF US
By David Freeman
Carroll & Graf. 278 pp. $23

IF THE national psyche retains any memory of King Farouk, it is of a roly-poly pudding of a man, flesh billowing as he waddled from one port of pleasure to another, trailed by toadying friends and beautiful, willing women. Tabloid readers, who might have been hard put to name the country he'd been exiled from, had no trouble remembering the sensual excesses that attached to his name.

In One Of Us, writer David Freeman has reached back into history to retrieve another Farouk, the slim and handsome boy prince who, in 1937, ascended to the throne of Egypt. That country in the 1930s was still a protectorate of England, with a high commissioner whose power was second only to the king's. In One Of Us the commissioner is Sir Malcolm Lyttelton Cheyne, a man whose towering height (6 feet 6) and imperious manner are the outward signs of an inner certainty that it is his duty to make the 15-year-old Farouk an English gentleman.

Jimmy Peel, properly educated at Winchester and Cambridge, is brought out to Egypt to tutor the future king. But Farouk is not a boy who feels the need of tutelage. Although he believes that Einstein, with his theory of relativity, is a "good man . . . I don't believe he's got it all sorted out. We'll have him to tea. I've a few questions for him." And as for the American Civil War, "I don't think the historians have got that one quite right."

When Peel tells Sir Malcolm of his failure with Farouk, the high commissioner patiently explains, "You are not expected to make a scholar of him. Teach him to behave as a boy his age in England would do. He should learn not to lose his temper at tennis."

On the surface Sir Malcolm is the older man counseling the young Farouk. But Farouk is not just an individual; he is also the embodiment of a country thousands of years older than England, an Egyptian who knows that to remain the same you must pretend to change, appeasing each new conqueror.

Jimmy Peel recognizes that Sir Malcolm "was the Empire, and just as our country had colonialized Egypt, he personally was determined to colonialize Farouk." And then in Alexandria arrives Vera Napier, beautiful and seductive; and the battle between the two men and the two cultures is made flesh. Vera, who has come in company with Sir Malcolm's niece, pursues the high commissioner and marries him. "Everyone said our marriage wouldn't last, that I had bewitched him," she writes later. "Well, I did. We bewitched one another for thirty-five years, and in all that time our marriage was tested only once."

By her affair with King Farouk.

Vera is a wonderfully vivid character. The child of an English father and an Italian mother, she combines the romantic idealism of the former with the practicality of the latter. She is determined to be the perfect Foreign Office wife, a hostess of note, a woman capable of aiding her husband as he works England's will on the world. Yet she is unable to resist the flattery of Farouk. The war gathers round Egypt, and German troops appear in the desert. "I knew it was wrong to assume that if I gave myself to the King, he would give Egypt to the Allies," she muses years later. "Yet I believed that if I got close enough to Farouk he would do as I wanted." It was more than that, she admits: "I dreamed that Malcolm and the Queen would fall magically away and I would become Queen of Egypt. I had spent so many years of my young life looking to make a good marriage, that simply because I had done so, was not enough to stop my imagination."

Freeman has told his story in two voices, alternating the account of Jimmy Peel with that of Vera. Through Vera we discover a Farouk capable of being touched by and giving loyalty to a woman. But it is Jimmy Peel who makes clear the cultural divide which keeps Farouk from becoming the perfect English gentleman. Idolized and isolated, he is denied nothing. Each morning a servant warms Farouk's lavatory seat with hot towels, and others bring his favorite horses to stand beneath his window, so that he may bid them good day.

It is the absolute power and the total childishness of Farouk that make him so fascinating. It may irritate Sir Malcolm, but the reader, who sees both city and palace through the eyes of Jimmy Peel, begins to understand the culture that produced the king. In 1952 Farouk was thrown off his throne, though, unlike many of his historical predecessors, he did not lose his life. But a king without a country is a figure of fun, and what most Americans remember are his 13 years of extravagant and sensual exile.

Sometimes it takes a novelist to make things real. It doesn't matter whether the young Farouk of One Of Us ever existed. In Freeman's hands he becomes not just a king but a country, and as such he earns our sympathy in ways the bloated exile never could.

Paperbacks

Non-fiction

Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner and O'Keeffe By Anne Middleton Wagner (California, $24.95)

DON'T call modernists Eva Hesse, Lee Krasner and Georgia O'Keeffe "women artists." "To identify an artist in this way, as a woman, has never been merely a parenthetical remark," writes Anne Middleton Wagner, professor of art history at University of California, Berkeley. "The qualification has customarily been offered as a limit to, rather than a guarantee of, suitability for the artist's role — with mostly irritating results for the artists themselves."

Not that being female was beside the point for these three; Wagner's book focuses on how that circumstance affected, in positive and negative ways, "the character of their imagery [and] the paths of their careers." Eva Hesse died of a brain tumor in 1970, at the age of 34; that tragedy, Wagner argues, causes critics to see Hesse as "endlessly gorgeous, girlish, incomplete, immature, melancholic, a symptom of the pathology of the female condition," though she created a body of work that compares to — even surpasses, in Wagner's view — O'Keeffe's and Krasner's.

An Albanian Journal By Edmund Keeley (White Pine Press, 10 Village Square, Fredonia, N.Y. 14063; $14)

WHEN the author and several other writers visited Albania to meet and exchange views with their counterparts, their guide told them that the most eye-opening thing he learned on his own visit to New York was how little Americans know about his country. The late dictator Enver Hoxha had insisted on building miles of fortifications against invasion, including invasion by America, when in fact few Americans had any idea where Albania was.

Although he took care to guard against sentimentality, the author found himself appreciating the "atmosphere of integrity and pride in the simple, unambitious village home we had just entered, a resource that made up for what, at least on the surface, seemed to be missing in the streets and public buildings and apartment house courtyards of the two cities we had visited . . ."

The Straight Dope Tells All By Cecil Adams; edited and with an introduction by Ed Zotti (Ballantine, $10.95)

THE GROWNUP'S answer to A. Leokum's once-famous column, "Tell Me Why," "The Straight Dope" appears in various city papers and journals around the country and addresses those peculiar anomalies and conundrums of modern life, e.g., the origin of Smiley faces, how the Grateful Dead chose their name and why pitchers can't hit. Adams presents, with his characteristic blend of breeziness and scholarship, the scientific answer to this last — pitchers are hired for their throwing skills, get fewer at-bats because they don't play every game, etc. — but he overlooks the key reason, first enunciated by novelist Gilbert Sorrentino: Pitchers are such poor hitters because they think of the ball as their friend.

Microsoft and BT in television coup

Simon Beavis

BILL GATES last week stole an important march in the race to provide Internet-based television to British viewers when he teamed up with BT to start trials of his Microsoft WebTV service across the country.

Initially some 200 homes will be used in a trial due to begin within weeks in what represents Mr Gates' most important breakthrough in the British television market.

The trial, run by a Microsoft subsidiary, WebTV, will be the first to test whether audiences have an appetite for using the net through their television sets, and how much they are prepared to pay. It could lead to a commercial service by the end of the year or in early 1999.

Although both sides stressed that their relationship was not exclusive and had been set up solely for the purpose of running the trials, the deal immediately set alarm bells ringing with competition watchdogs. A spokesman for Oftel, the telecoms regulator, said: "We always have concerns when two players with a huge degree of market power get together. We will be watching this very closely."

Pace Microtechnology and Philips — two makers of digital TV set-top boxes — will also be involved in the trials.

With Britain racing towards the digital TV services on three platforms — satellite, terrestrial and cable — this autumn, Microsoft made it clear that it saw the UK as a key market for its TV software technology.

All digital TV players intend to offer Internet and interactive TV as part of their multi-channel pay-TV offerings in the new era.

But the WebTV technology will allow viewers to stick with analogue television yet be able to surf the Net and have access to e-mail and enhanced TV viewing where broadcasters can link programmes to special information packages on the Internet.

The deal comes as Microsoft and BT are at loggerheads with competition authorities in the United States and Europe over their plans to expand Internet services.

Microsoft is facing a US Justice Department investigation into alleged anti-competitive behaviour in the Internet browser market and BT's joint venture with BSkyB — British Interactive Broadcasting — is being delayed by the European Commission.

BT denied that the venture with Microsoft jeopardised its involvement in BIB or indicated that it expected to be thrown out of the venture by the European Commission.

The BBC crosses the Rubicon

COMMENT
Alex Brummer

THE decision by the BBC to sign a $565 million commercial agreement with the Discovery Channel — which is wired into John Malone's TCI cable empire — is a defining moment for Britain's flagship broadcaster.

Selling the odd television series overseas and spin-off videos and consumer magazines is one thing: getting into bed with the sharp-elbowed big guys of the rapidly growing United States cable system is quite another. The pretence that the BBC is simply a public service broadcaster, untainted by the multi-billion dollar world of global commercial television, is now challenged.

In signing a deal on this scale, granting Discovery a high degree of access to archives and joint production, Auntie Beeb has crossed the Rubicon. The deal raises a series of unanswered commercial questions. How is it possible to place a true value on what the BBC is selling to Discovery when there is no means of crystallising the value of the assets? Is it sound corporate governance for a broadcaster — essentially financed by the taxpayer through a compulsory licence system — to be using those funds potentially to enrich American shareholders? By going ahead with this deal, does John Birt, the director-general, risk diminishing the global value of an élite broadcasting brand? If the BBC continues to pursue this commercialisation route, will it any longer be able to justify a $3.2 billion levy on the taxpayer?

Ever since Birt began the business expansion of the BBC in the early 1990s, it has maintained the fiction that all of its business activities are fully transparent. The Discovery deal demonstrates that they are not. The economics and arithmetic are shrouded in mystery — as is the business logic.

A co-production with one big player endangers potential arrangements with others.

Sure, it will be great for "Cool Britannia" if it gains large dollops of American money to develop creatively. But the suspicion must be, given the prices being fetched by even minority cable channels in the US, that the BBC has locked itself into a near-exclusive arrangement. This runs counter to the current phenomena of non-exclusive deals being pursued, particularly in Hollywood studios.

A closer look at the Discovery deal allows an insight into the problems of the chosen method of increasing the BBC's global presence. The BBC and Discovery will invest some $175 million over the next four years in co-productions. No doubt the BBC's production values will be respected. But if this programming is to be used on US channels and is intended for worldwide distribution, there must be a danger of brand dilution for the BBC.

The most important element of the deal is, no doubt, the creation of a BBC America channel. For this, Discovery will gain the chance to go walkabout in the BBC archives, selecting whatever it wants for broadcast in the US. Since the BBC will own 50 per cent of the equity in the new Channel, it may feel it has protected the licence-payer's interest. But has it? The value of the BBC archive is almost certainly in the billions, not the hundreds of millions.

Potentially, the Discovery link could be very valuable. The BBC stake in the Discovery Animal Planet (some 20 per cent) is already worth $120 million. So a new channel with rights to use BBC material in the US, could eventually turn out to be an extremely valuable property. This ought to be very satisfactory for Britain, because it will increase the market for the UK's creative output and for the BBC, since it will enhance its reputation as a commercial player.

Amid all this enterprise, a way needs to be found to ensure that the BBC's ultimate owners — the British government and the licence holders — are properly rewarded.

The suggestion of mutualisation from the Institute for Public Policy Research is intriguing both because it comes from Labour's favourite think-tank and because the transfer of some mutuals, such as the Halifax, into public limited companies, has allowed the remaining mutuals to demonstrate the benefits of that form of ownership.

What is clear, however, is that as the commercial side of the BBC builds up and it starts to create its own asset, equity and earning-base, the need for and size of the licence fee will come into focus.

To prepare itself for any changes, the BBC needs better corporate governance and transparency. Cross-subsidisation from the licence fee to new income producers, such as BBC America, needs to be measured, quantified and accounted for and public service broadcasting ring-fenced.

Only then can sensible decisions be taken about ownership structures, protection of the brand, allocation of assets and whether the licence fee has had its day.



Pounding away . . . A protester shows his feelings over the European single currency outside the Assembly Rooms in York, where European Union finance ministers met last weekend PHOTO LYNNE SLADKY

Sustainability takes a step forward

Terry Slavin sees a new initiative on green development proving to be popular in the boardroom

SUSTAINABILITY is not a word that sits easily with spreadsheets and cost-benefit analyses on the boardroom table. But a controversial movement that has revolutionised business practices in Sweden and made inroads in corporate United States is now aiming to put environmental issues on the table in the UK.

Yorkshire Water, Tarmac, Sainsbury, Body Shop and the Environment Agency have signed up to try Natural Step, an initiative founded by Dr Karl-Henrik Robert, a prophet of the US green business movement.

Environmentalist Jonathon Porritt, who is spearheading the UK initiative, says Natural Step "slices through the confusion" over what sustainable development means. "It provides companies with a scientifically rigorous set of rules," he says.

Dr Robert is a cancer scientist who became frustrated that bickering over the nitty-gritty of environmental issues was preventing scientists from agreeing what action needed to be taken. He decided to come up with four conditions that organisations must meet. In essence, these are:

- ☐ Fossil fuels, metals and other materials should not be extracted faster than they are redeposited into the Earth.
- ☐ Substances shouldn't be produced faster than they are broken down in nature.
- ☐ We must not take from nature more than can be replaced.
- ☐ We must be fair and efficient in meeting basic human needs.

Companies that sign up commit themselves to phasing out petroleum products, unrecycled minerals and non-biodegradable compounds, and must make conservation and waste reduction a priority.

It's a tall order. Swedish acolytes — including Ikea, Electrolux, McDonald's Sweden, Swedish Rail, OK Petroleum and Scandic Hotels — are still struggling, nine years on, to meet Dr Robert's conditions. But a serious effort is being made.

George Martin, director of environment for Tarmac's construction service unit, says he's not sure how easily Natural Step will adapt to UK corporate culture, or how useful it will be for Tarmac. But he says: "Natural Step is the only approach which gives you a framework to weigh all the issues up."

For those who adopt Natural Step, there can be tangible financial benefits. Interface, a US flooring company with annual sales near $1 billion and plants in 26 countries, cut its $70m annual waste stream by $38m in the first two years. At Interface Europe's factory in West Yorkshire, all its electricity, more than 1 million Kwh per year, is generated by renewable sources.

However, the science behind Natural Step is controversial. Clive Hambler, a conservation ecologist at Balliol College, Oxford, says Natural Step's conditions fall to pieces under scientific scrutiny. "I think it's an oversimplification based on naive ecology," he says. Condition 4 has nothing to do with science, he adds.

The intentions are laudable: "But the methods are going to have to be much more specific or they can be used to put on a green gloss."

But at Yorkshire Water Geoff Roberts, head of environmental regulation, says: "The issue isn't whether Natural Step is absolutely right in a scientific sense, but whether they are moving us in the right direction. We scientists have a nasty habit of not wanting to do anything until there's absolute proof. That's a recipe for procrastination, rather than progress."
— *The Observer*

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates March 23	Sterling rates March 16
Australia	2.5119-2.5153	2.4871-2.4916
Austria	21.55-21.57	21.32-21.34
Belgium	63.17-63.28	62.52-62.58
Canada	2.3770-2.3793	2.3530-2.3552
Denmark	11.67-11.68	11.55-11.56
France	10.27-10.27	10.16-10.17
Germany	3.0639-3.0668	3.0313-3.0336
Hong Kong	12.98-12.99	12.89-12.90
Ireland	1.2190-1.2215	1.2081-1.2104
Italy	3.016-3.021	2,984-2,987
Japan	218.34-218.63	215.81-216.06
Netherlands	3.4531-3.4560	3.4168-3.4194
New Zealand	2.9799-2.9843	2.8610-2.8658
Norway	12.66-12.67	12.63-12.64
Portugal	313.55-313.90	310.29-310.60
Spain	259.74-260.01	257.14-257.31
Sweden	13.30-13.32	13.21-13.23
Switzerland	2.5002-2.5034	2.4843-2.4872
USA	1.6762-1.6772	1.6651-1.6659
ECU	1.5412-1.5437	1.5278-1.5295

FTSE100 Share index up 161.9 at 5947.0, FTSE 250 index up 157.7 at 5520.5. Gold down $0.75 at $293.75.

Ian Wylie answers key questions about private medical insurance

Overseas, under cover

FALLING ILL in a foreign country can be extremely stressful, but the financial implications could be even more devastating if you and your family are not covered by international private medical insurance (PMI).

Primary medical services such as doctors and medicines may be available and inexpensive in the country in which you live. But in many countries there is no national health service, and if you haven't needed medical attention overseas before it takes a good imagination to appreciate the very high cost of healthcare abroad. Claims of $170,000 are not unusual, and even in countries where the UK has a reciprocal healthcare agreement some items must still be paid for and can be expensive. In other parts of the world, such as the Middle East, PMI is mandatory if you want a work permit.

Many expats receive medical benefits from their company. But if you have to arrange your own, you will find that cover and prices vary greatly from one insurer to another. If you already have a UK medical policy, ask first for a quote for offshore cover. Expats should check too what PMI is available where they live — it may be that local insurers offer the most suitable policy.

However, you are likely to be more familiar with the reputation of British PMI providers. Furthermore, emergencies can be exacerbated by language complications, so you may feel more comfortable dealing with English-speaking claims assessors when you need a quick response.

What does PMI cover?

In general, the more you pay for PMI, the wider the range of benefits and the greater the geographic spread of cover. Medical insurance is probably the last area in which an expat should cut corners. At the very least, your PMI policy should provide cover for hospital accommodation, major and minor surgery, theatre fees, drugs, intensive care, in-patient and out-patient consultation in radiology, physiotherapy, pathology, oncology and radiotherapy, nursing at home and emergency cover.

Optional extras generally include GP, dentist and consultant fees, outpatient cover for treatment and therapies such as acupuncture, osteopathy, chiropractic and homeopathy, and check-ups either before or after in-patient treatment.

David Pryor, director of insurer ExpaCare, says that expats should consider their lifestyles as well as the strengths and weaknesses of local healthcare when deciding which benefits to choose. If you are in Angola, for example, you may not want to have your teeth treated by a local dentist, and so dental cover may be inappropriate, he says. Similarly, why pay for maternity cover if you are a single man working abroad?

An important area often overlooked by expats is emergency evacuation and repatriation cover. If it is included, you should ensure that the benefit includes both travel and accommodation costs, and that return as well as outward costs will be met. You should also check whether the policy will cover the travel and accommodation costs of someone to accompany you.

What does PMI exclude?

As with all insurance policies, there are conditions and exclusions. These vary from insurer to insurer. For example, chronic illnesses — those which require treatment over a long period of time and which may be incurable — are not generally covered by the big insurers, such as Bupa or PPP, but are covered by some of the smaller insurers, such as ExpaCare. Other exclusions tend to include pre-existing conditions, psychiatric and mental illness, normal pregnancy and childbirth, misuse of drugs and alcohol, self-inflicted injuries, HIV, Aids and cosmetic surgery.

Injuries sustained during sporting or other dangerous activities are usually excluded too, although some insurers, such as Exeter, will cover skiing accidents, while Bupa and William Russell place no restrictions on sports injuries.

You also need to be aware of the exclusion of pre-existing conditions (PECs), which is the insurers' way of making sure PMI policies are not abused. However, definitions of a PEC vary. Some insurers, such as Bupa, say that a pre-existing condition is a medical or dental illness or injury that originated before the policy was taken out, and includes any related preceding or consequential condition, and recurrence of any previous condition.

Insurers rely heavily on PEC clauses, because few prospective policyholders are required to undergo a medical unless they are over a certain age, usually 65. Some insurance companies do not even ask for a detailed questionnaire to be completed, although a full health declaration must be signed.

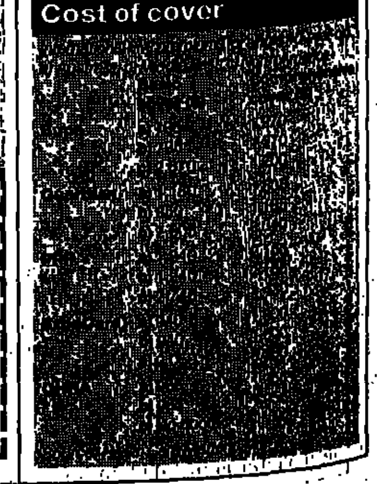
Insurers have a second line of defence, in the form of a moratorium — a no-pay zone that lasts for a set length of time after the policy begins. For example, any illness you may have had in the five years preceding the start of the policy may automatically be excluded for the first two years of cover. But again, these differ widely from insurer to insurer.

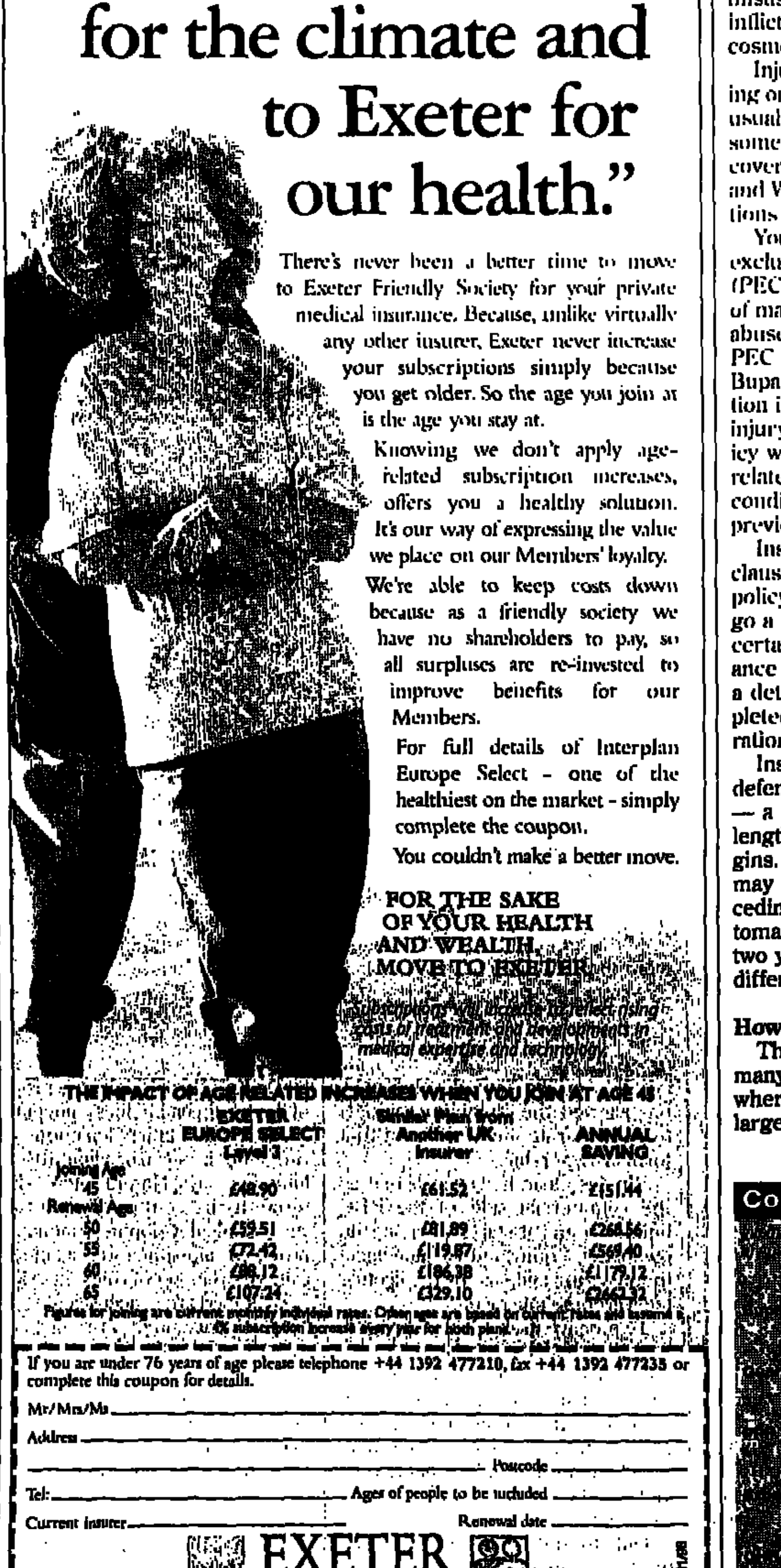
How much does PMI cost?

The cost of PMI depends on many factors, not least your age and where you live and work. By and large insurers believe that the older

continued on page 19

Cost of cover





Many PMI insurers exclude claims pertaining to injuries incurred from activities such as mountain sports

Continued from page 18

you are, the more likely you are to make a claim. Ages are usually separated into clear-cut bands, such as 25-29, 30-35 and so on. The biggest age-related premium increases usually come when the policyholder breaks through the 60-65 barrier.

If you balk at the premiums being quoted (see left), you could opt for a budget plan. But with PMI you generally get what you pay for, and some budget plans have limited cover. Like other forms of insurance, you can often cut the cost of cover by consenting to an excess and agreeing to pay the first $1,500 or so of medical expenses. For example, with Exeter you can cut your premiums by 7.5 per cent, 12.5 per cent or 17.5 per cent if you are willing to pay the first $170, $400 or $850 respectively. Some insurers, such as OHRA, offer family discounts for spouses and children insured under the same policy.

Key questions to ask PMI insurers

- What are the benefits?
- Are there any limits on benefits?
- Are chronic conditions excluded?
- How long is the moratorium period?
- How are hospital bills settled?
- Is there 24-hour assistance?
- Are any countries excluded from worldwide cover?
- Is the policy portable?
- Are there premium discounts for voluntary excesses?
- Do premiums increase with age?
- Will you still insure me when I'm 64 and over?

The escalating cost of PMI cover has encouraged providers to look for ways to keep the lid on premiums. Managed care — the tactic of screwing down hospital costs — has all but halted PMI premium rises in the United States. And the largest insurers, such as Bupa and PPP, have taken a first step by channelling their subscribers through preferred providers — a select list of hospitals worldwide. In return for guaranteeing them business, the insurers demand a fixed price on common operations such as wisdom teeth extraction, hernias and knee or hip replacements.

Can I choose where to receive treatment?

Accident and emergency treatment will always be carried out at the nearest suitable hospital. But insurers recognise that expats, by their very nature, like the freedom to roam and most PMI policies allow policyholders to choose where they want to have non-emergency treatment.

Worldwide cover frees the policyholder to go anywhere. However, it isn't quite an open chequebook. An important distinction is made between what are termed selective (urgent) and elective (non-urgent) treatments. So if, for example, elective treatment is requested outside the country in which the policyholder is residing, then they will have to pay their own travel costs. A system of pre-authorisation — where the expat has to forewarn his insurer of an intention to seek treatment elsewhere — sieves out policyholders who want to use an in-growing toenail as an excuse for a shopping trip to New York.

If you are living in North America or the Caribbean, you are likely to find international PMI premiums as much as three times as expensive as if you were living in Europe, simply because treatment there is extremely costly. A handful of insurers, including OHRA, simply refuse to insure in North America while some of the larger insurers, such as Bupa, are building partnerships with US healthcare companies to try to prune treatment costs. Yet North America offers possibly the most advanced and comprehensive treatment, so most health insurers protect themselves by dividing the world into three sections: the USA/Canada, Europe, and the rest of the world. However, some countries, such as Switzerland, Italy, Japan and Singapore, can also be singled out for higher premiums because their healthcare provision is expensive.

Is PMI cover portable?

North America aside, most insurers will continue to cover you during temporary holiday or business trips away from your country of residence. But if you are likely to be posted to several countries, you will need to ensure that the insurance company does not exclude any of these countries, and that its premiums are competitive in each country you are likely to visit.

Transferability of cover is important, particularly if you intend to retire back in the UK, where the cost of PMI for those over the age of 60 tends to be expensive.

Do I need PMI cover in Europe?

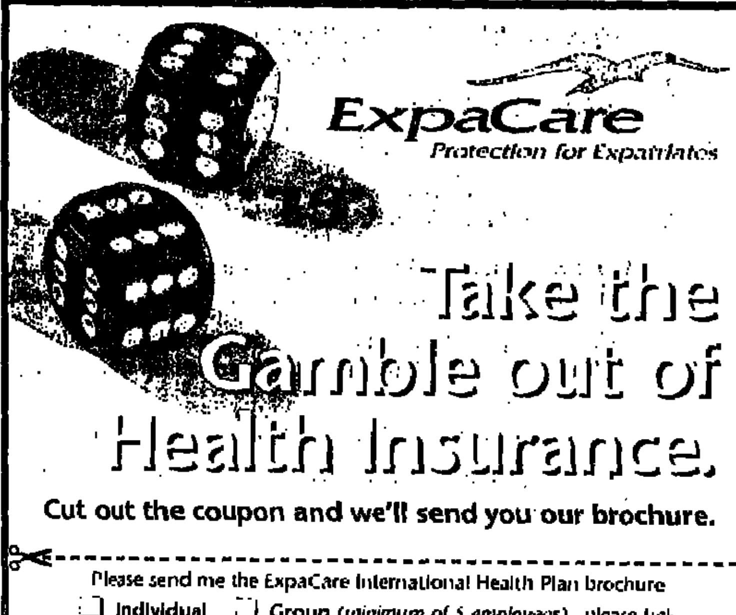
Holding a European Union passport will come in handy if you live in a member country, as these hold reciprocal healthcare arrangements. Non-EU countries such as Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein are also part of the same agreement, which entitles EU citizens to receive the same treatment on the same terms as the nationals of the countries they are visiting, working in or living in.

To make use of this arrangement you will need to fill in form E101, a certificate for expat workers that indicates which member state is responsible for their healthcare. Then, depending on how long you intend to stay, you will need to complete either form E111 or E106. Form E111 entitles the holder to essential treatment during visits of up to one year. You should fill in form E106, however, if you intend to be resident for more than a year.

Of course, each EU country has its own rules for state medical provision, and state-provided treatment may not cover all the things that a British expat might expect to receive free of charge on Britain's National Health Service. In some countries treatment is free or you may have to pay just part of the cost. In others, you may have to meet the full cost of treatment and then claim a full or partial refund. Significantly, form E106 does not cover repatriation, nor the cost to move someone to their home country in the event of illness or death, and so most insurers advise an international PMI policy to top-up local provision.

PMI contacts

Bupa: (+44) 1273 208 181
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Bringing up baby

Dr Benjamin Spock

FOR more than half a century, Dr Benjamin Spock, who has died aged 94, author of The Common Sense Book Of Baby And Child Care and prominent anti-nuclear campaigner, was the most famous name in the field of child-care and parenting. First published in 1946, his book was an immediate success. Through six editions it has sold more than 50 million copies, making it the 20th century's best-seller, second only to the Bible in publishing's all-time sales chart.

Baby And Child Care, the product of reconciling concepts of psychoanalytic training with years of listening to mothers talking about their children, sought to reassure parents and apply common sense to the rearing of their young. "Trust yourself," Spock wrote. "You know more than you think you do . . . Don't take too seriously what the neighbours say. Don't be overawed by what the experts say. Don't be afraid to trust your own common sense." It was a formula that worked.

The eldest child of a railroad lawyer, Benjamin Spock, and his wife, Mildred, the young Spock grew into a tall, gangly youth. He was tied closely to his mother's apron strings at their home in New Haven, Connecticut, until, in 1923, he escaped into rowing — and the Yale crew. He won a gold medal in the 1924 Olympic Games, in which Yale represented the United States in eights. Spock danced with Gloria Swanson on the liner taking the crew to France. The star addressed the tongue-tied young man in her arms as "Big Ben but no alarm".

Although he resented his mother banning the wearing of sneakers, keeping him in short pants well into his teens, and making him live at home in his freshman Yale year lest life in the dorm should be corrupting, Spock's mother's love of babies was one of the things that influenced him in becoming a pediatrician. After Yale, he specialised in pediatrics and psychiatry at Columbia university, New York, practised medicine and, while doing war service with the US navy in California as a psychiatrist (he had also undergone analysis), worked on his book in the evenings with the help of his first wife, Jane Davenport Cheney. After the war, he taught at Western Reserve university.

Spock's family background was Republican, but his move from Yale to New York radicalised him. So did the New Deal and the Spanish Civil War. But his politics remained passive until a 1960 television appearance with Jacqueline Kennedy who said, "Dr Spock is for my husband, and my husband is for Dr Spock!" The resumption of nuclear testing by Khruschev, and then by Kennedy, alerted Spock to the global peril of the nuclear arms race. He feared for the future of his army of children and began painfully to realise that, having set out with a mission to reassure mothers, he was now going to have to alarm them in order to save their children from radiation.

His first real campaigning act was to draft a full-page advertisement in the New York Times for the National Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy (Sane). He backed the "peace in Vietnam" presidential candidate, Lyndon Johnson, leading the Doctors for Johnson Committee, but was soon publicly denouncing him for betraying promises. Spock then took to the streets in his neat, blue consultant's suit, and tried to avoid being caught up in the internal politics of the peace movement. He continued to campaign hard, even in 1985, spending six months on the road working for various peace groups.

In a Boston show trial he was convicted of conspiracy, along with the Yale chaplain, the Rev Sloane Coffin Jr and others, for inciting young Americans to burn their draft cards. The convictions were overturned on appeal because the judge had given the jury a 10-point loaded questionnaire in addition to the task of deciding innocence or guilt.

Spock retired from teaching in 1967 but continued to write about aspects of childcare, and in 1970 published Decent And Indecent, a careful and clear account of his own political experiences and philosophy.

At one stage, however, he had fallen foul of the women's movement. When he addressed the National Women's Political Caucus in 1972, Gloria Steinem told him: "I hope you realise you have been a major oppressor of women in the same category as Sigmund Freud."

In the light of the women's movement, he revised some of the conservative views expressed in early editions, and in the 1976 version of Baby And Child Care, every pronoun was changed, and the advice for fathers to compliment their daughters on their pretty dresses had disappeared. Spock was, at one stage, hailed by Ms magazine as a hero of the women's movement.

In the 1980s he became profoundly disillusioned with the materialism of the young and what he called the Superkid phenomenon, in which "parents get excited when they read that some kid has been taught to read at the age of two and immediately want their child of two or three to be taught to read", and of the desire to win at all costs, in both sport and in life. The change came after the Vietnam conflict was settled, but Spock consoled himself that a generation could change its values again just as quickly.

THE 1990s, however, bought him little comfort. In a new foreword to the sixth edition of the book, in 1992, he lamented the strains and stresses of American family life and blamed both men and women for being obsessed with work. "Many women have, in a sense, joined the rat race," he wrote. A seventh edition of Baby And Child Care will be published on his birthday in May.

Spock travelled widely to places such as China and Nicaragua to further his political education. His recreation since 1924 was sailing, mainly off Maine and the Virgin Islands. In 1976 he divorced Jane Cheney and married Mary Morgan Councille, and took up the oar again on the lake at the foot of her Arkansas garden, where they both went sculling. He had two sons by his first marriage.

Christopher Dodd

Sheila Kitzinger writes: Dr Spock was the first of the baby experts to make it clear through his writing that he respected women and treated them as intelligent adults. In Baby And Child Care he told them that they could trust their feelings and their own experiences as they learn from their children, and, unlike many experts, he nurtured their self-confidence.



Spock the doctor . . . 'the first of the baby experts who respected women as intelligent adults'

He never talked down to his readers, and wrote in a warm, non-didactic, personal way, for fathers as well as mothers, that enabled them almost to enter a dialogue with the author. It was as if he was not only talking, but also listening to them.

Spock respected and delighted in children, and included anecdotes from his own childhood, his experiences of parenthood and of being a stepfather, and his own mistakes. He shared with his readers the adventure of being a parent, rather than setting himself up as an authority figure.

His view of love and sex, however, was firmly heterosexual. He clung to a view of the ideal family as a state of Janet-and-John calm and reasonableness, with a tender, concerned mother and a father who was a real pal. He believed that one of the main tasks of raising children was to prepare them to build such families themselves. He was strongly opposed to physical punishment, to the steady diet of television violence, and to the whole idea of raising children with the single goal of success in a selfishly acquisitive society.

It is often claimed that in later editions of his books Spock ditched his earlier belief in tolerance and was horrified at the way in which he had encouraged relaxed child-rearing. But this is a caricature of his views.

He never repudiated his earlier philosophy. There was, instead, an evolution. The change came about with the horrors and the waste of human life of the Vietnam war, and his indictment by the Johnson administration for his activities in opposing that conflict. The Rev Norman Vincent Peale, for instance, preached a much-publicised sermon, in which he denounced young men who refused to fight, claiming they were undisciplined because their parents had followed Spock's teaching and given them "instant gratification".

No longer just the understanding pediatrician who loved children, Spock became politicised and, in his 1969 edition, warned parents not "to keep their eyes exclusively focused on their child, thinking about what he needs from them and from the community, instead of thinking about what the world . . . will be needing from the child".

Child-rearing is not merely a domestic matter. It is a political issue. Spock's values about society were not separate, but integral to how he thought good parenting should be.

Benjamin McLane Spock, born New Haven, Connecticut, May 2, 1903; died March 15, 1998

Soviet dancer who gave her soul to ballet

Galina Ulanova

GALINA ULANOVA, who has died aged 88, was one of the greatest ballerinas of all time and a profound influence upon the art of ballet through her extraordinary skill in lyrical-dramatic interpretation, and the purity of her classical style.

Born in St Petersburg to dancer Maria Romanova and stage manager Serge Ulanov, she was trained by her mother and then by Agrippina Vaganova, at the Maryinsky Theatre school.

She joined what had become the Kirov in 1928. Five years later she danced her first major role as Maria, the virtuous heroine of Rostislav Zakarov's Fountain Of Bakhchisarai, which revealed the qualities that informed all her roles — complete understanding of and identification with the characters she was playing.

The Kirov Ballet was evacuated to Perm during the second world war and so Ulanova, who as a schoolgirl had endured the privations of life in Petrograd during and after the Revolution, escaped the worst horrors of the siege of Leningrad. In 1944 she joined the Bolshoi Ballet, together with Leonid Lavrovsky, who became its director and principal choreographer. With other recruits from Leningrad they were charged with raising the profile of the Moscow troupe which, triumphantly, they did.

In 1945 she made her first appearance in the West, in Soviet-occupied Vienna, and subsequently danced in Rome, Florence, and Venice. It was her performances in Florence in 1951 that first won such acclaim from Western critics that her name, already known from films and from reports from Russia, became a legend for lovers of ballet throughout the world.

But it was the first appearance of the entire Bolshoi Ballet in the West, at London's Covent Garden in 1956, which set the seal on Ulanova's fame. No one who witnessed that historic first night will ever forget the revelation that was the company and, above all, Ulanova dancing one of her greatest roles, but dancing it at the age of 47. The ballet was Lavrovsky's Romeo And Juliet with Ulanova as Juliet and Yuri Zhdanov as her Romeo. At its conclusion, Margot Fonteyn was in tears.

Fonteyn, wrote many years later: "I have never seen another dancer with her liquid quality of movement, each step melting into the next with an inevitability that built its own tension."

She was twice named a Hero of Socialist Labour and received the Order of Lenin, the highest honour the Soviet Union could bestow. Boris Yeltsin, in tribute to her, said: "Her life and the art of dance to which she gave her soul has become part of Russian and world culture."

Mary Clarke

Galina Sergeyevna Ulanova, ballerina, born January 8, 1910; died March 21, 1998

Back to the bad old days

EDITORIAL

THERE was a time when General Charles de Gaulle, before bringing in the Fifth Republic in 1958, used to lambast those who allowed themselves to lose sight of the national interest and preferred to sup their "little brew", cooked up on their "little gas-ring".

In those days it was common for the outcome of a democratic election to be perverted by wheeler-dealing of all kinds: people would vote, say, for the Socialist Pierre Mendès France and find they were landed with the more rightwing Edgar Faure.

Those bad old days seem to have been ushered in again by last week's regional polls, at which voters elected their regional councils on March 15 and the new regional councillors elected their respective presidents five days later.

A number of long-standing centre-right regional leaders were disavowed by the electorate on March 15, yet were able and prepared, in the absence of any clear majority, to do a deal with the far-right National Front (FN) in order to cling on to power.

In so doing, five regional presidents — Charles Millon, Jean-Pierre Soisson, Jacques Blanc, Charles Baur and Bernard Harang — turned themselves into the puppets of the FN leaders Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Mégret.

IL VOULAIT QUE JE LUI CIRE LES BOTTES MAIS JE L'AI ENVOYÉ PROMENER !

'He wanted me to polish his boots, but I told him to take a hike'

Before even attempting to assess the long-term repercussions of the political maelstrom that overwhelmed the French right last week, one needs to acknowledge two plain facts.

The first concerns the dividing line within the ranks of the right itself: up until the regional elections it separated the neo-Gaullists in the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) from the rest of the right; it now distinguishes those who favour working hand in hand with the FN from those who do not.

That is a pretty depressing message for the nation's voters who, when they elected Jacques Chirac as president in May 1995, thought they had placed a repository of Gaullist ideals in the highest office of state.

The second upshot of the regional elections concerns the other branch of the neo-liberal right, represented by the confederation of parties known as Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF). All good things have to come to an end: the UDF has imploded.

Take the cases of the most prominent regional presidents who "cheated" — the term used by the RPR leader, Philippe Séguin — namely Blanc, Soisson and Millon. Blanc has never been too fussy about principles; Soisson goes whichever way the wind blows, even if it is an ill wind; and Millon, once a great fan of the Socialist Jacques Delors, lost no time in sacrificing his principles by doing a deal with Le Pen's henchman, Bruno Gollnisch.

They are all politicians whom the former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing took under his wing in the hope that they would galvanise the UDF, a movement which, when it was founded in 1978, was supposed to embody a modern, less factionalised France, had broadly pro-European convictions, and believed in opening up to world markets and decentralising at home. In all its essential tenets, then, the UDF stood for the complete opposite of FN ideology.

Twenty years on, the standard-bearers of what they like to call "advanced liberal democracy" have just initiated a process of regression that is bound to prepare the ground for the far right.

The exceptions are François Léotard and François Bayrou, who officially head the UDF confederation. Léotard has acted honourably (he immediately sacked Millon, Soisson, Blanc, Baur and Harang when they agreed to be elected to regional presidencies with the help of FN votes).

In theory, Bayrou heads a party, Force Démocrate, that defines itself as Christian-Democrat. One can only wonder what is preventing him from jumping the UDF ship now that it is heading for such choppy waters.

All those who refuse to accept what has undoubtedly been an insult to their ideals must surely now realise it is high time they changed tack.

(March 22-23)

Latin America pays high price for violence

Serge Marti in Cartagena

THE Washington-based Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), a multilateral organisation in which 28 Central and South American nations, 16 European countries, and Israel and Japan have a stake, was this week told by its president, Enrique Iglesias, that "violence is not a biblical curse to which we are inevitably doomed".

At the IDB's annual assembly, held from March 16-18 in the northern Colombian city of Cartagena, the soaring level of violence in both urban and rural areas was the subject of lengthy debate. Also discussed were unemployment, poverty and marginalisation, all of them serious risk factors for still shaky democracies and for economies which in some countries are still hamstrung by the cost of armed conflict and long-drawn-out peace processes.

In less than 20 years the political face of Latin America has changed radically. Of the 26 nations in the region that belonged to the IDB in 1980, only 13 could call themselves democracies. Today all the governments in Latin America are in office as a result of free elections.

At the same time, with macro-economic reforms being pushed, and sometimes rushed, through at the instigation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, most South American nations have become "emerging countries", with average annual growth rates of more than 5 per cent. In 1997 the region achieved growth of 5.7 per cent, a rate that the IDB says is unparalleled since 1980.

But this new wealth, encouraged by a record inflow of foreign capital, has not benefited everyone. At last year's assembly the IDB recognised that poverty was on the increase as a result of mounting unemployment, job insecurity and inequalities. Although there was a slight fall in unemployment towards the end of the year, most wealth generated remains in the hands of less than 20 per cent of the population.

There will have to be an annual increase in gross domestic product of at least 6 per cent if Latin American countries are to have any hope of reducing unemployment. In 1998 the combined effect of the Asian crisis and El Niño will probably keep the figure down to 3.3 per cent.

The goal the IDB has now assigned itself is the reduction of social inequalities. The World Bank, too, has decided to re-orientate its investment projects towards the reconstruction of the social fabric and the "sustained growth" of local microeconomies.

"Marginalisation and inequality remain the two main scourges of Latin America and the Caribbean," Iglesias said, pointing out that more than 150 million people, or one-third of the Latin American population, are still living well below the poverty line.

In 1997 the IDB approved $6 billion worth of loans, more than a third of it going to education and health. It also believes in supporting small businesses and playing a greater role in the improving the training and efficiency of government staff.

But it is the fight against violence — believed to cost the region more than 2 per cent of it annual GDP, or about $15 billion — that is the priority this year. The Colombian cities of Bogotá, Cali and Medellín will receive $57 million in loans to help them compensate for the drug cartels' financial activities. Uruguay will get assistance worth $17.5 million to help it fight juvenile delinquency.

"Some may believe that in acting in this way the IDB is straying from its traditional area," says Mayra Buvinlv, the IDB's "Ms Anti-Violence". "But we all need to remember that violence is a major obstacle to economic development."

This shift to a more socially orientated policy has been energetically advocated by the countries hardest hit by violence, particularly Colombia, whose president, Ernesto Samper, has come up with a proposal for an "inter-institutional" fund, open to all countries in the region, that would subsidise substitute crops and local micro-development projects, which he says are the only way to halt cocaine production and eradicate the guerrilla forces that often protect coca plantations.

Countries that have recently emerged from many years of civil war are also being helped by international financial institutions. El Salvador is to get $35 million to improve infrastructure in regions devastated by fighting. Nicaragua will be the beneficiary of several IDB programmes, including a $30 million loan for rural development in the country's poorest areas.

One of the most interesting initiatives is a programme called "Decopaz" (community development in favour of peace), which aims to allow Guatemala's indigenous communities to initiate and manage their own local development projects.

About $50 million will go to regions where attempts are being made to encourage the survivors of 34 years of armed conflict and the tens of thousands who fled to the neighbouring Mexican province of Chiapas to live together again. The refugees have now returned and are waiting to get jobs — all of which need to be created from scratch.

(March 19)

Washington welcomes UN leader

Afsané Bassir Pour in Washington

WHEN he visited Washington on March 11-12, the United Nations secretary-general, Kofi Annan, was warmly welcomed by the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon and even Congress.

But Annan's America aides have no illusions, despite what they describe as "the warmest reception Washington has ever given a UN secretary-general". "Annan was fêted because of a shift in public opinion and not because Washington has patched things up with the UN," they say. "Once again the press and the American leadership were overtaken by the public mood, which is why Washington waited 16 days before publicly thanking the secretary-general."

One aide quoted President Harry Truman's quip: "If you're looking for a friend in Washington, buy yourself a dog."

Annan himself is equally realistic. "I know that if the agreement with Iraq doesn't hold the climate in Washington may quickly turn against the UN," he told Le Monde. "For the moment the agreement is holding and I'm reaping the benefits."

As for the UN's chances of success in Iraq, Annan remarked: "In 1991 the US went to war with Iraq. Six years later, it still had problems with the Iraqi regime. Should one therefore infer that it failed?"

Annan went to Washington to try to "put an end to a deadlock" — the non-payment by the US of almost $1.5 billion of arrears it owes the UN. He was unsuccessful. Certain Republican members of Congress remain resolutely hostile to any such payment.

But Annan expressed the wish that President Bill Clinton's administration "would be more aggressive and get Congress to settle the debt". He cited Article 19 of the UN Charter, which states that a member in financial arrears to the organisation shall have no vote in the General Assembly.

Annan's successful mission to Iraq seems to have given him "self-confidence", according to a high-ranking member of the US administration. Two years ago the UN was "politically radioactive" in Washington. "It may be less so today," he says, "but you won't find a single politician, whether Democrat or Republican, who would be prepared to stick up for the UN against the opinion of the Republican right."

On March 12 Annan was the guest of his sternest critic in Washington, Senator Jesse Helms. To everyone's surprise, Annan was also backed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, who, with presidential ambitions in mind, "seems to have realised it could be profitable for him to defend the UN", according to a diplomat.

Annan gave a modest assessment of his Washington trip: "We now seem to be a little more acceptable in Washington. Miracles don't happen overnight."

(March 14)



Clint Eastwood talks to **Jean-Michel Frodon** about his hard-won independence and his latest film (reviewed below)

A free man in Hollywood

AT HIS bungalow headquarters in the middle of the Warner Studios lot in Los Angeles, Clint Eastwood sat in characteristically relaxed mood with his luminous-soled trainers — of questionable taste — perched on his desk.

He talked readily about how he directed and produced his latest film, Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil. "I didn't choose John Berendt's book, but [rather] its screen adaptation by my friend John Lee Hancock, who scripted A Perfect World. Warner, who owned the rights, didn't want Hancock's adaptation when he offered it to them.

"I was immediately interested, though I'm not quite sure why. I can't claim I went overboard for it. I just said to myself: I'd like to see it on the screen. I'd like to tell that story.

"I told the studio bosses that if they had no objection I would like to direct the movie on the basis of John's screenplay. 'Go ahead,' they replied. It's been like that for years between Warner and me: I tell them what I want to make, they say yes, and I make it."

Eastwood makes it sound like child's play. But behind his relaxed exterior there lurks a hardworking perfectionist. When he finishes one movie, he lets it be known he is in no hurry to make the next one. Then, before anyone knows, he is at it again.

At the moment he is working on a project called True Crimes, the present-day story of a reporter who champions a man he believes to have been wrongly sentenced. "The trouble is that 10 years earlier the reporter had campaigned for another accused man whom he also believed to be innocent, but who turned out to be guilty."

Shooting is due to begin in May in Oakland, the Californian city where Eastwood, who was born in 1930, spent his early childhood.



Clint Eastwood and his wife, Dina Ruiz: 'I try to react like a jazz musician . . . it's up to the listeners to say if they like it or not'

"I also act in the movie," Eastwood said, without alluding to suggestions that have been made that the poor United States box-office performance of Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil has had something to do with the fact that he himself does not star in it. "I never ask myself what reception the movies I make are going to get from the public," Eastwood says. "The main thing is to do what one has to do, and to be happy with it."

It would be naive to believe that this proclamation of independence reflects an attitude that he has had from the beginning: like everyone else in Hollywood, Eastwood has constructed his career. He has gone all out for projects that established, focused and broadened his image in the eyes of the public.

Today the director/actor/producer Eastwood enjoys genuine independence. This situation dates from well after the time when he founded his own company, Malpaso Productions, in 1970, or when he formed his apparently cast-iron relationship with Warner after The Outlaw Josey Wales in 1976.

According to the trade press, Eastwood has since earned the studio $1.5 billion. That is probably why Warner's bosses feel they can afford to let Eastwood have his little "outbursts".

Eastwood has a different approach now: "I refuse to be forced to obey the rules that require one to cater for teenage audiences by making action-packed movies full of special effects. I was aware that audiences might not be quite sure what Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil was all about. The title is bizarre, anyway, and people wonder whether it's a horror film. But it's the movie I wanted to make, with the title I wanted and everything else I wanted."

He illustrated his view of the competence or otherwise of the studio bosses by describing an episode that took place a long time ago, when he was "just" an actor — and not even a star.

In 1971 Universal refused to give Don Siegel's Dirty Harry, a film now unanimously accepted as one of the best Eastwood has acted in, its chance at the Cannes Film Festival, or even a proper commercial release.

"The movie caused me a lot of problems with the studio. In those days I didn't know how to handle studio people. Siegel and I were proud of the movie, and proud of the enthusiastic response it had got from film buffs like Bertrand Tavernier and Pierre Rissient, who handled its release in France.

"But the bosses said: 'What the hell do you think you're talking about?' They were the people who were supposed to know, they were the experts, and they weren't even able to give the movie a decent release in the States."

Becoming your own producer or directing your own films is no guarantee of independence in Hollywood, Eastwood says. Even success is not enough; it merely enables you to move from a position of dependence, as was the case at the time Dirty Harry was made, to a position where it is possible to negotiate.

Later the balance of power can shift, but never entirely in your favour: "I used to work under the system where I was forced to shoot a movie the studio wanted me to make so that in return I could make a more personal movie. But things have changed: I can now make two personal movies in a row without being forced to barter.

"It's working at the moment anyway — until such time as they pull the plug on me!"

As a result of having to make concessions to the majors as well as getting a chance to direct more personal movies, Eastwood's filmography is of uneven quality. But he is honest enough to assume responsibility for it in its entirety, in the best tradition of auteur directors.

"I don't make any distinction between the movies I've made — they're all part of my life, even if some of them mean more to me than others. I've a greater affinity with Bird than with Heartbreak Ridge, but I always attempt to give a personal touch even to projects I don't myself initiate.

"I try to react like a jazz musician: you have a theme, or sometimes just a chance to get together with some musicians, so you play, and that's that. It's up to the listeners to decide if you've invented something or not, up to them to say if they like it."

(March 12)

Ritual and murder in perfect Southern style

CLINT Eastwood's latest film as director, Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil, opens with a woman singing a gentle, mournful ballad, *writes Jean-Michel Frodon*. The camera glides through magnificent parkland dotted with tombstones. Is the "garden" of the title a cemetery? It would be an oversimplification to say so, but that at least is what Minerva, a plump voodoo priestess, thinks as she watches a plane coming in to land.

On the plane is John Kelso (John Cusack), a New York writer who has been assigned by his magazine to write a gossip column from Savannah, Georgia, a perfectly preserved Southern city.

Savannah's attractions include 24 parks and gardens (not including cemeteries), some splendid mansions dating from before the Civil War, a way of life as gently ambling as the camera movements of the opening sequence, and a wealthy, charming and mysterious antique dealer called Jim Williams (Kevin Spacey).

It looks as though Williams is going to become the central character of the film instead of Kelso. But it does not turn out that way. There is no central character in the film — that may be why Eastwood himself decided not to act in it.

With each new character and each new twist in the plot, the spectator becomes more uncertain as to whom to focus attention on, what leads to follow, and even what genre the movie is supposed to have adopted.

That is precisely the challenge of Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil, the most rewarding, complex and courageous film that Eastwood has so far directed.

It opens like a fantasy film. When Kelso arrives we seem to be in the middle of a chronicle of provincial life. The party thrown by Williams, Savannah's biggest social event, which Kelso is covering for his magazine, could have come straight out of a sumptuous social parable by Visconti.

After a murder is committed, the trial and other episodes call to mind the film noir, the thriller, the courtroom drama and their many variants. All these genres thrive in Eastwood's "garden", with music, love and comedy thrown in for good measure.

This labyrinthine construction is no mere affectation. The fragmentation of the narrative totally suits the subject of the film, one to which Eastwood has returned again and again: contemporary America.

The film is based on a remarkable book of the same name by John Berendt, which has been a best-seller in the United States. The literary quality of the book resides in Berendt's subtle handling of authentically "documentary" material.

Shot on location, and in some cases using real-life characters, the film humourously exploits the associations triggered by its subject matter.

But, unlike the book, this is no bittersweet portrait of a community peopled by weird characters. Eastwood gives all of them a quality of exemplarity — even the wackiest, a hypochondriac scholar who goes around with live maybugs pinned to his clothes and a phial with which he threatens to poison the whole city, and even the most uncouth, Williams' lover Billy (Jude Law), a handsome hooligan with angelic fair hair, whom Williams shoots at the end of the party.

The dislocation of the narrative mirrors the state of a society where everyone is defined by his or her most restrictive membership of a group. Everything hinges on rituals: the black bourgeoisie's club, the married women's society, the prison, the courtroom, Southern dandyism, the voodoo used by Minerva in a bid to rescue Williams from jail, the football team's supporters.

It goes without saying that rituals are never better illustrated than when they are transgressed — as they are repeatedly by the many weirdoes who appear in the film.

The transgression and sense of belonging inherent in Williams' homosexuality occupy a key position in this mosaic. His sexual proclivities are portrayed accurately and without the slightest concession to political correctness.

EASTWOOD'S camera delineates a fragmented world with classic simplicity. His approach reflects the title of the film: good and evil are not opposites, they are merely symmetrical. Here we are worlds away from the simplistic and Manichaeistic approach that underpins all too many Hollywood productions.

The American public hated the film for the same reasons that French audiences hated Jean Renoir's La Règle du Jeu when it came out in 1939. Both films subvert film genres; both refuse to allow the spectator to identify with any of the characters; both describe a society that has turned its mini-rituals into an unintelligible jumble of signs after losing sight of its real reasons for existing.

Eastwood has long explored the degradation and perversion of the American dream. Here he conjures up an atmosphere of resigned gloom that improbably puts across the most heartwarming of moral messages. As in most of Eastwood's films, an outsider — in this case Kelso — turns up in a town; but this time, as never before in an Eastwood film, the outsider stays on, builds up relationships and is adopted by the local community.

In other words, despite being fragmented and hidebound by its codes and rituals, that community seems capable of integrating new members, as it used to when America was one big melting pot. That also happened to be the heyday of the American cinema, whose sole heir today is Clint Eastwood.

(March 12)

Le Monde

Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

Net generation set to rule boardroom

Simon Caulkin on the bright, young masters of the Web universe

THIS year $20 billion of business will be done on the Internet. That's about the size of the economy of Vietnam or Iraq, and three times the figure for "e-commerce" last year. By 2000 the total may be five or even 10 times as much again.

The figures are of course conjectural, but more interesting than the raw totals themselves, however extraordinary they may be, are their implications.

Business on the Internet is not only beginning to change the shape of industries, it will also in time alter the way they are run: the Net generation is coming.

It is easy to see that what the telephone did to the economics of retail banking, the Internet — which cuts the cost of doing transactions still further — will do in spades for many other sales and distribution businesses.

Many people have heard of Amazon.com, the online bookseller that is using its lower cost-base to undercut the conventional book trade. But what if the same scenario were applied to retailing of every kind? If just 10 or 15 per cent of shoppers forwent the supermarket trip and did their weekly grocery shopping by computer, a large part of the vast supermarket real estate would become unviable or redundant at a stroke — or at the click of a mouse.

In other areas, "disintermediation" is speeding up the economy (and cutting prices to the consumer) by removing middlemen. Direct sales, as offered by Dell Computer in the United States, are just part of it. Estate agents in the US now find they have to compete with a countrywide network of property owners buying and selling homes on the Net.

The same is true of travel. Consulting a travel agent could soon become a thing of the past: the cheapest air fare, and the ticket to get you to your destination, are only a couple of mouse clicks away.

These changes in the economic value chain are paralleled in the workplace. For instance, the number of software programmers in the US doubled between 1984 and 1994 from 500,000 to 1 million — and by the millennium it will have nearly doubled again. (For comparison, employment in the US car industry is 800,000, around the same as in 1950, even though the population has increased by 100 million.)

And the Net itself is starting to generate direct employment. It goes without saying that in the four years since the Internet took off, almost every large international company has put up a website. The first generation of pages are, to put it bluntly, rather crude. A survey last month of 100 top corporate websites by Shelley Taylor & Associates found that while one or two corporate sites were excellent, many were frustrating to navigate, discouraged direct contact by customers, employees and investors, and gave little management information.

Most companies, the survey concluded, had "failed to respond to the opportunities presented by the Internet". However, as companies recognise that the Web is not just a gimmick, they are beginning to devote resources to it.

Who are the workers performing the strange new jobs of "cyber commander", "Web wizard" and "Web mistress" — just three titles that have been spotted in corporate cyberspace? One thing's for sure: they are not the gentlemen in suits from the boardroom floor, most of whom don't know their HTTP from their HTML. Some of them, according to Shelley Taylor, don't even know how to call up their own company website.

Web power is, of course, in the hands of younger people, who have grown up with the multimedia technologies and are dubbed the "N" or Net generation. For them, the Net and its technologies are no more mysterious than television was to their parents.

Taylor is convinced that in the future the corporate website will be not be an add-on, as now, but the company's living centre. How the company's website works is how the company works. If this happens, many companies will find themselves in the near future effectively dependent on a workforce that is different from any other in corporate history.

In the US, hip companies know that the way to get cool webpages is to use those best qualified to author them — schoolchildren. Child labour is back. According to some reports, children from the age of 10 are earning up to $80 an hour on their computers. Thriving companies set up by teenagers are commonplace.

In the stable world of the past, points out Nicholas Negroponte of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, it might have been true that those who didn't know history were condemned to repeat it. In a world of extravagant possibility such as the Internet, the reverse is the case: those who know the past are likely to be its prisoners, at least technologically.

Another reversal: skills that were strictly non-vocational in the past are now in demand. Who would have guessed that fine arts would be a suitable background for the new generation of Internet jobs? Yet as companies compete to make their websites more appealing and intuitive, a real niche is opening up for young people with distinctive and adaptable artistic talent.

In Growing Up Digital (McGraw Hill), Don Tapscott argues that the change has the potential to generate not only political upheaval but nasty intergenerational conflict. While their seniors have the wealth and control the channels, the young have the technological whip hand.

The young know better than the old; the pupils are controlling the curriculum; and the infants are in charge of the nursery.

Perhaps the World Wide Web will end up achieving what even Tom Peters could not: liberating management from the iron grip of white, middle-class, middle-aged males.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
March 29 1998

When a white American was secretly sworn in as Guyana's president, latent racism surfaced. **Pauline Melville** reports from Georgetown

In the graveyard of dreams



Joy spills on to the streets of Georgetown as the People's National Congress leads, briefly, in last December's election. But there are fears that the political struggle will ignite a racial one PHOTO: RICARDO MAZALAN

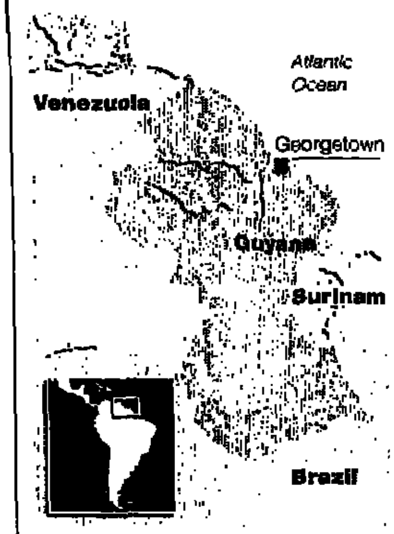
I *FIND* myself sitting next to Mike Atherton as the England cricket team crowds on to a small plane leaving Guyana for the next Test in Barbados. He is reading the memoirs of Pablo Neruda, the Nobel Prize-winning poet from Chile.

Atherton is impressively familiar with Guyanese literature and mentions the recent death of Martin Carter, Guyana's best-known poet. Clearly, he is more knowledgeable about the region's literature than I am about cricket. So we talk about books and about Guyana.

Despite having been warmly greeted by the president and the joyful cacophony of steel bands, he is aware that the match could have been cancelled because of the violent political and racial turmoil that followed elections in December.

With play about to begin at Bourda, protesters were flinging stones at President Janet Jagan's car at the state opening of parliament. A visiting Caribbean Community Secretariat (Caricom) dignitary shook his head in dismay.

The country was Britain's only colony in South America. It hangs in a limbo, neither part of Latin America nor one of the Caribbean islands. Most of the population lives



along a narrow strip of Atlantic coast, on reclaimed swampy land below sea-level.

The capital Georgetown is a sweltering city of beyond-redemption, dilapidated white wooden colonial buildings, tall palm trees, clutters of unambitious shops and wide, once handsome streets whose dry grass verges are dissected by stagnant canals.

The vast hinterland of rainforest and savannah is where most of the Amerindians, who make up 5 per cent of the population, live and where coastlanders rarely venture. The country is in the grip of El Niño, causing a prolonged period of scorching drought. News escapes from here about as often as light from a black hole.

"They voted tribe again," says a despairing friend. The two main political parties are the ruling People's Progressive party (PPP), whose members are mainly the Indo-Guyanese descendants of indentured labourers recruited from the Indian subcontinent after slavery, and the People's National Congress (PNC), mainly Afro-Guyanese. Although both parties deny such an agenda, the danger is that the political struggle will ignite a racial one. Indo-Guyanese slightly outnumber Afro-Guyanese.

Jagan is the widow of Cheddi, the East Indian who led the PPP for more than 40 years and was noted for his part in the independence struggles of the fifties.

The surprising trajectory of her life has taken this Chicago-born Jewish woman from being a student nurse in the United States to being the elderly leader of an underpopulated country. But opponents still contest her right to office. The proportional representation system means that individuals are not directly voted in by the electorate but are appointed by the party.

The election was a fiasco, starting with a reasonably orderly poll on December 15 and descending rapidly into a quicksand of incompetence, confusion, suspicion and allegations of corruption. Guyana has a history of rigged elections. Results were announced, then they were contradicted, changed or denied.

A member of the Elections Commission that organised the electoral process described "a growing sense of siege in the city" and admitted a "total breakdown in the system". Daily protests by the PNC were followed by looting and violence. With an electorate of about 460,000, it took two weeks before the final count was in. Meanwhile banks closed, shops were boarded up.

Protesters slashed at "white dolly" effigies of Jagan with machetes, paraded coffins and conducted obeah (similar to voodoo) rituals outside State House with knives, candles and potions. East Indian shops were raided. Several women were attacked and stripped in the market place.

The swearing in of the president was rushed through secretly as the opposition applied for a court order to prevent it. A few hours later, in the middle of the official ceremony to present her with the instruments of office, the president was served with a writ by a high court marshal that she nonchalantly flung over her shoulder in full view of the television cameras.

The ensuing huge demonstration was tear-gassed. Marches were banned. An even larger illegal demonstration took place. The city was paralysed. Business confidence dived. The giant Canadian electricity company SaskPower got cold feet and pulled out of the country, which teetered on the edge of total breakdown.

Finally, Caricom, the region's common market, sent in a rescue mission of three statesmen to broker an uneasy peace between the warring parties. The interim report on the elections by the Commonwealth observer team refrained, like a benevolent aunt, from mentioning the racism institutionalised in the history of the two main political parties. But one of the three statesmen on the Caricom mission, who preferred not to be named "while things are so delicate", admitted that "of course, race is key".

My friend and I sit in silence. She stares off into the distance. Outside, the yellow kiskadee birds give their occasional sweet, harsh call. "This place caan' fix," she says. True, Guyana has always had to pedal hard to remain in the same place. I remember some of the last cryptic words of poet Martin Carter — "Swamp want 'e land back" — implying the futility of human struggle against the implacable forces of nature in these parts.

"It was certainly a kick in the teeth for business," says a senior executive of the Guyana Sugar Corporation. He looks down from his office window, several storeys up, remembering the racial conflagration that he witnessed from almost the same vantage point in the sixties — a looting mob rampaging down Water Street while, incongruously, a couple of streets away, shoppers went about their business.

"People will blame the downturn in the economy on all this upheaval," he said, "but it was already on a downward path. Both the rice and the sugar crops have been badly hit by the drought. The falling price of gold has affected the mining companies and the timber industry has been thrown off course by the collapse of the Asian economies."

I *GO* to interview Jagan. She rises to greet me. She is a white-haired, unpretentious, informal woman who still retains her American accent. There is a pleasantly brisk matter-of-factness about her. She could be the headmistress of a select girls' school.

I ask her how she feels about the white dollies brandished in the protests. "I find any sort of racism offensive," she replies wearily and goes on to tell me that after 54 years of political activity in Guyana, she now feels more Guyanese than American.

I ask her if there is any parallel between herself and Sonia Gandhi, the widow of India's former prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in terms of dynastic politics. "Absolutely not," she replies. "I have had a long political career of my own." But within weeks of the election her son is sworn in as an MP.

And why was her swearing in as president so rushed? She explains that they got wind of the opposition attempts to thwart it and feared the consequences of a rudderless state. It seemed likely, she says, that the PPP already had enough votes to ensure victory.

But what made her throw the court order over her shoulder? "Oh, the famous incident." She pulls a wry face and then admits with disarming candour: "I didn't even think a second. I just tossed it over my shoulder."

Somewhat defensively, she goes on to recall the many occasions in the past when her party was fraudulently manipulated out of office. Unfortunately, such gestures in a country like Guyana revive the ghosts of empire and the image of the white plantation owner's wife acting with supercilious disregard of the law.

I press her on why so many of the boards of Guyanese public companies are stacked with Indo-Guyanese officials. She sighs and concedes that something will have to be done about this.

I ask her if she enjoys power. She hesitates and then says: "My husband was purely political. I have obligations but I also like other things." She smiles and for a moment there is a woman who would like to spend more time reading or with her grandchildren, a woman not entirely preoccupied with the exigencies of state.

But the country is not stable enough for her to relax yet. I ask about the vexed question of Amerindian land rights, denied by successive governments. She insists that land rights will be granted by her government. I express doubt. She insists again.



President Jagan: 'I find any sort of racism offensive'

I fly into the interior to spend time with family in the savannahs near the Brazilian border. Georgetown life is aeons away. Here politics does not have the same racial dimension as on the coast. But this time politics has split some villages. One Macusi farmer likens the political divisions in previously unruffled Amerindian settlements to a virus "that makes everybody sick".

CHANGE is coming whether people like it or not. Increasing numbers of coastlanders, Brazilians or outsiders with reforming zeal have disturbed the traditional way of life. But now a fine dust settles everywhere. Everything is parched. Drought has gripped the place. Creeks are low, fish scarce. Savannah fires, often set off by Amerindians themselves, rage unchecked. The cassava crop, the staple diet of Amerindians, is under threat.

Guyana has frequently turned out to be the graveyard of dreams. Sir Walter Raleigh's fantastical description of the place in the 16th century was the first example of how its image can depart from reality. Those early claims that Guyana was the site of El Dorado attracted many who discovered that it was the land of mud. There is a bigger gap here between expectations and fact than in most places. "You Guyanese are always full of expectant euphoria," someone once. The trick is to be realistic without murdering hope.

Perhaps Guyana will cease to be one of the poorest countries in the world. At night the Southern Cross hangs at one end of the sky and the Big Dipper at the other. The country's future hangs tantalisingly between remaining with the poor of the southern hemisphere and the dreams of the rich north.

Atherton has fallen asleep on the plane next to me and missed his — a dry cheese roll and a carton of cherry drink. I save him half of my cheese roll, for about five minutes, then I eat it. He wakes as the plane wheels and turns to land in Barbados, and pulls a face at the sight of more arid plains and the prospect of another dry and dusty pitch. — *The Observer*

Pauline Melville's novel The Ventriloquist's Tale won the Whitbread first novel prize this year

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
March 29 1998

The traditional image of Mafia women as long-suffering, faithful supporters of their gangster men is being shattered, writes **John Hooper**

Blood sisters

I*T IS* often said that life in Italy's underworld could have come from a film. In the case of Francesca Gemelli and Pietro Mancuso, they did. Mancuso, a member of the Ficareddi "family", one of the most powerful gangs in the Calabrian Mafia or 'Ndrangheta, had been ordered by his boss to kill Gemelli. Instead, he fell in love with her.

Whether unconsciously or consciously (and according to police, Italian mobsters often turn out to have a shelf of gangster videos), the former car salesman was acting out the role of mafia hitman Jack Nicholson in the 1985 film Prizzi's Honor.

For generations, the role of women in Italy's crime syndicates was simply to offer unstinting and, above all, unquestioning support. The gangster's mother, wife and sisters were not meant to know anything of the decisions or activities of the all-male secret society to which he belonged.

The story of Francesca Gemelli shows those days are over. But it also suggests that Italy's godfathers are increasingly bewildered by women who do not conform to the Mafia stereotype — and do not yet know how to deal with them. In this case, an underworld boss's efforts to curb the influence of a woman on his organisation looks likely to be the cause of its downfall.

Gemelli, aged 32, was born in the run-down southern port of Reggio Calabria, an area that has been controlled by Mafia families for decades. Her family had links to organised crime; her brother, Alberto, is a member of the Ficareddi clan of the 'Ndrangheta. Francesca, it emerged, far from playing the traditional supportive role of a sister, threw herself into mob life.

Two *pentiti* — literally "penitents", Mafia defectors who turn state's evidence in exchange for police protection — testified that Gemelli helped them while they were on the run. They also claimed that, after her marriage to a lorry driver, Vincenzo Pronesti, she hosted a meeting of another clan, at which plans were laid for a variety of crimes, including murder. At the time, unknown to her husband, she was having an affair with one of the godfather's lieutenants, the pentiti alleged.

Yet, despite their evidence, when the authorities last year mounted an operation to smash the gang to which Gemelli's lover belonged, it was not her but her husband they put behind bars. Throughout southern Italy, many judges remain unshaken in the belief that if women play any role at all in the underworld, it is a subsidiary one. It is a prejudice that women magistrates find frustrating. According to one prosecutor in Reggio Calabria, if they had only pursued women linked with mob crimes, a lot would have been solved more quickly.

After three weeks behind bars, last August, Pronesti succeeded in convincing the court that he had no involvement with what he called his wife's "intrigues". The judge who released him took into account the fact that the couple were now separated. The grounds on which Pronesti got his separation were twofold: Gemelli's infidelity and her maltreatment of their two daughters. Custody of the girls was later given to their father.

The extraordinary story of Francesca Gemelli gets even more complicated. Earlier, she'd begun an affair with another 'Ndrangheta hoodlum, Salvatore Giunta, a member of her brother Alberto's own clan. As she must have known, this time she was getting into deeper water. Under the archaic code of morality that still exists in parts of Calabrian society — and nowhere more so than in the underworld — it would have been up to her brother to ensure she did not bring dishonour on his family by having a relationship with a man who was not her husband.

I*T IS* impossible to know what passed between Alberto Gemelli and Giunta. Gemelli may have threatened him to keep away from his sister. What is known is that, in October 1994, Gemelli and his girlfriend walked into an ambush from which they were lucky to escape with their lives. A judge who investigated the incident concluded that the ambush had been set up by Giunta "to remove an obstacle to his relationship with Francesca Gemelli". If so, his ploy backfired badly. He was arrested, tried and given a 12-year prison sentence for attempted double murder.

Santa Puglisi, daughter of a reputed Mafia boss, was shot dead in Catania in 1996 while visiting the tomb of her husband, who had been killed earlier in a Mafia ambush PHOTOGRAPH: SALVATORE RAGONESE

Francesca Gemelli was fast becoming a liability. Her close relationships with more than one of the Ficareddi clan's men meant that she probably knew as much about the clan's activities as anyone except the boss, Giovanni Ficara. Ficara decided she had to be eliminated. But, as had already been made clear, Gemelli was fatally attracted to gangsters — and gangsters to her. It was a detail whose implications Ficara overlooked.

The man he ordered to kill Gemelli was Pietro Mancuso. Mancuso followed Gemelli and got to know her. Instead of murdering her, he fell under her spell. After the two became lovers, they decided their only chance of survival lay with the state. In March 1995 Mancuso, whose membership of the 'Ndrangheta had been unknown to the authorities, walked into a police station and announced he wanted to confess to a life of crime.

Almost three years passed before the full consequences of his decision became evident. In January police in Reggio arrested five people in dawn raids on safe houses used by the Ficareddi clan. The charges included racketeering, armed robbery, murder and drugs and arms trafficking.

Police and prosecutors said afterwards that much of the evidence against them had been provided by Mancuso and Gemelli, who now live a clandestine existence under Italy's witness protection scheme. Not even Gemelli's two daughters know her whereabouts. "They speak to her occasionally by phone," her lawyer says, "but never face to face." Nobody knows what either of them looks like. Under Italian law, the media are forbidden to publish photographs of those who are helping the state in its war on organised crime. In any case, it is not unknown for pentiti to be given plastic surgery to change their appearance.

It is more than two years since the couple were last seen in Reggio Calabria. When they return, it will be as star witnesses in a trial that is expected to blow apart one of the most powerful clans in the 'Ndrangheta.

The changing face of Mafia women

Concetta Managò stood by her childhood sweetheart, Francesco Condello, for 12 years while he was in hiding in the Calabrian hills, waging a war against a *rival* Mafia clan led by Domenico Gallico. In 1989 Condello was killed by a car bomb. His widow took her children to meet his enemy, Gallico. She says he was kind to her and offered them protection. She moved in with him, then told him where her dead husband's men were hiding; Gallico sent his assassins to find them. The pair were arrested and Managò was charged with murder. She quickly agreed to give evidence against him, in return for her children's safety.

Liliana Caruso defied Cosa Nostra tradition and refused to denounce her husband, Mafia boss Riccardo Messina, when he turned informer. The wives of his former associates paid her a series of calls, cordial at first, then menacing. In 1994 she was shot dead by hitmen.

Pupetta Maresca became known as godmother of the Naples Mafia when she shot the man who killed her husband. After 14 years in jail, she moved in with another Mafia boss, Umberto Ammaturo. When her son disappeared in 1974, her jealous husband was number one suspect. But without proof, Maresca could do nothing. "If he had once admitted it, I would have killed a man for the second time in my life."

Clare Longrigg

Writers freed by a spell in prison

John Ryle

"P*RISON*", suggests the acerbic diarist of the Times Literary Supplement, "is a good place for a writer." The TLS diarist, James Campbell, is a frequently ruthless chronicler of the foibles of the intelligentsia. He is not, though, in this instance, making a blanket recommendation that writers should be sent to jail. What he is saying, rather, is that writers who happen to be incarcerated can become, as a result, better at writing. Or, as he puts it, in the switchback highbrow-lowbrow idiom favoured by contemporary literary journalism, "Great works of literature have emerged from nicks".

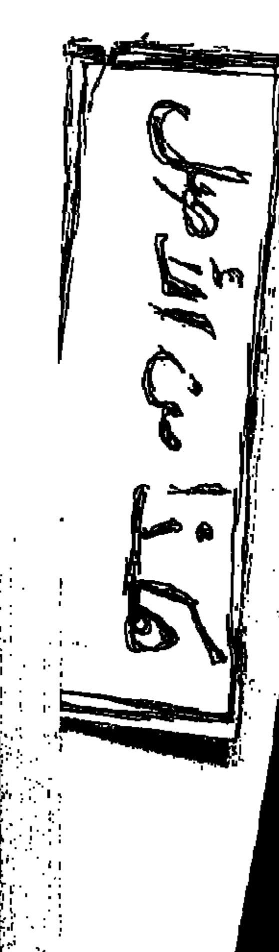
The works he mentions — among them Arthur Koestler's Darkness At Noon, Solzhenitsyn's One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich and Victor Serge's Men In Prison — are just a few of the literary fruits of incarceration. There's a case for saying that the Western canon would not be the same without the literature of imprisonment, starting with the Bible and Plato (at least three of whose dialogues concern the trial, imprisonment and execution of Socrates).

Should we be glad that great writers had to suffer to leave this inheritance? It's an old question, most vividly put by George Steiner. Where would we be, he asks, without Stalin? There would be no Mandelstam, no Pasternak, no Solzhenitsyn — or not as we know them. It is not a flippant point: the writers of the Gulag suffered as much as any prisoners in history; tortured, deprived of paper and writing instruments, it was often a miracle that they managed to write at all. (The Indonesian writer Pramoedya Anata Toer, 15 years a prisoner in Suharto's Gulag, dictated passages to fellow inmates who wrote them down on their release.) But for these writers suffering became their subject, it focused their art.

At a more humdrum level, in civilised countries, imprisonment may seem to offer optimum conditions for writing: solitude, and freedom from distraction. The expression "chained to the desk" takes on a new meaning. When Bertrand Russell was imprisoned as a conscientious objector in the first world war he found prison quite agreeable. "I had no engagements, no difficult decisions to make, no fear of callers, no interruptions to my work." (Russell, it may be noted, was only in prison for a week.) It is a notion that has occurred to others, at many levels of seriousness. Readers of Hugh Lofting's Doctor Dolittle books will remember that Dr Dolittle looks forward with relief to a spell in a debtors prison. A doctor with the miraculous gift of speaking animal languages, he is besieged by patients from the woods and hedgerows. In prison, he imagines, he will finally be able to get some writing done. Once there, though, he finds that the animals have burrowed into his cell and are demanding his attention in greater numbers than before.

Writers who dream of confinement are probably not reckoning on the Gulag experience. Their fantasy is more likely to resemble the living conditions of a drug baron in a South American jail, where money and influence can get you a private suite with a cook, a library and an Internet connection. The nearest they can get to this is a writer's colony, a popular form of voluntary incarceration.

But there is at least one contributor to the TLS who knows about the real thing. Peter Wayne, sent down for armed robbery 10 years ago, transformed himself into an architectural scholar while in jail. He has since written and broadcast on baroque architecture and — yes — the architecture of prisons. He also writes a column in another periodical, Prospect. In the current issue he discusses Karlo Stajner's account of the Soviet Gulag, 7,000 Days In Siberia. A decade before Solzhenitsyn, Stajner described the conditions in which Stalin's prisoners were kept. "His excruciating pains," Wayne writes, "make mine pale into insignificance." The good news is that Wayne is about to be released. The column in the current issue of Prospect represents, he says, the last thousand words of his sentence. An editorial note announces that the next issue of the magazine will feature the first of his columns as an ex-prisoner. The bad news is that the April issue of Prospect has gone to press without Wayne's contribution. The editor, David Goodhart, tells me the copy never arrived. Since his release, it seems, Wayne has found better things to do than meet deadlines. So the TLS diarist may have a point.



Letter from Buenos Aires Andrew Graham-Yooll

Staying power

TWO anniversaries of note are being marked these days. The English Club, a watering hole for generations of expatriates in the grey, smelly city centre of Buenos Aires, is 100 years old. The Dorado Club, an anglers' and drinkers' refuge built in an idyllic setting in the islands across the Paraná river, north of Buenos Aires, has just turned 80.

The club anniversaries show the permanence of the British presence in the River Plate area — an influence that survived a first military invasion in 1806, 19th century growth and decline, nationalisation of the British railways in 1948, the end of the meat-packing trade in 1972, and the Falklands war in 1982.

Now British business investors are setting up all over Argentina.

The English Club, whose president is half Irish and half Scots, originated in the Albion Club, founded by a Mr Wilde in 1893, and took its current name in 1898. It has always been in the same area, between the banking and the former red-light districts of Buenos Aires.

Although the present premises have been in a 15-storey office tower since 1965, some of the habits of old still hold. The *atorrantes* (scoundrels) group of members meet for long lunches and much wine on Fridays, and are named after the engineering firm, A Torrents & Co, that laid the iron drains of Buenos Aires a century ago. The pipes were used as temporary dwellings by the destitute, who became known as *atorrantes*.

In 1983, with the economy in ruins at the end of the worst dictatorship in a century, the English Club incorporated the much older Strangers' Club, founded in 1841 and which organised Buenos Aires' first stock exchange.

The British, or English-speaking community (for few now are born Brits), never quite came to terms with Argentina, and set themselves apart. They stood clear of the corruption, but approved by omission of murders by the military. Killing leftwing dissidents was considered acceptable because the guerrillas killed army officers. So the British community failed to see the horror of the "disappeared" in the seventies. They saw generals as trustworthy heroes, even when most generals were crooks.

One of those criminals, General Juan Carlos Ongania, who died two years ago, sent mounted troops into the university in July 1966, destroying a generation of learning, and putting Argentines on the road to nearly 15 years of civil war. But by British community standards he was good because he painted railway stations white and blue, and locked up noisy trade unionists.

English clubs sprang up all over Argentina, wherever the railways stopped or farming communities settled. The English are good at clubs; people can get together without noticing each other. The Dorado, started in 1917, moved to its present beautiful site a couple of hours from Buenos Aires in 1937. The Dorado became a refuge from town life and spouses.

POLITICS for the Dorado membership, as for most of the community, was a dishonourable and dirty pursuit. Which is one reason why the Anglo-Argentine community is still relied upon for its honesty. The "Anglos" are trusted board members and seen as impartial mediators. All these years later, even after the Falklands-Malvinas war, they are still considered more reliable than the rest.

Thus politics have bypassed the Anglos, with their Caledonian Ball in July and Burns Night at mid-summer (because it is too hot for haggis in January). The surreal, lingering presence of the corrupt dictators and generals of the past few decades will be hardly noticed at gin-and-tonic time at the anniversary dinner ball on May 15. And surreal it is that Argentina needs the Anglo-Argentines now more than ever. Their clubs and customs may be old-fashioned, out of touch in many ways, but as a group they are one of the only remnants of honesty in a corrupt country.



Keepers of the flame . . . UK Royal Mail lighthouse stamps were launched at Smeaton's Tower, Plymouth Hoe with, from left, keepers Terry Johns, Eddie Matthews and Bill Arnold PHOTOGRAPH: MARCH L

A Country Diary

John Vallins

SOMERSET: **On a section of the disused Somerset and Dorset Railway track, where it skirts the hillside at Cole, a surprising outcrop of brashly modern brick houses makes a strong case against piecemeal development in green space. But the valley below holds its own. The stream is bordered with pollarded limes. The buildings are in local golden stone, and the 18th century manor has a watermill.**

Beside the stream is a smallholding with free-range chickens, two pigs, and 73 goats. It began 11 years ago with three. Some are Golden Guernseys. A few of these, including one national champion, are classics — aristocrats with long, elegantly shaggy coats. Others have smooth coats, and their colour varies from creamy pale to deep red-brown. Like Channel Island cattle, Guernsey goats produce creamy milk.

But the herd must earn its keep as well as look beautiful and win prizes. Besides the Guernseys, there are plenty of British Toggenburgs. They are the goat equivalent of Friesian cows, giving the maximum return in terms of volume of milk on what they eat. They have quaintly attractive faces, striped like a badger's, and are as sociably inquisitive as the Guernseys, gathering round, pushing and nuzzling, nibbling at unfamiliar objects like a visitor's jumper.

Milking is at 5.30, morning and evening, 365 days a year. The owner does not have a day off. On odd occasions, when she has unavoidably had to ask a friend to stand in, the yield has dropped by about a third. The goats do not give of their best except to her.

The milk is transported twice a week to a cheese-maker. Goat meat, eaten in great quantity in other parts of the world, is not familiar in Britain, but goat's milk is increasingly valued for digestibility and benefits to health.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

I READ **that the United States once contemplated going to war with Britain because Africans escaping American slavery had been sheltered on British territory. Has anyone more information?**

THE issue most likely referred to was part of a running conflict between Britain and the US over Florida. Runaway slaves had established communities with the Seminole Indians in Florida going back to the time before the American revolution. Florida passed into British control in 1763, and back to the Spanish and then the French before being taken over by the US. During this time the runaway slave community grew and, together with the Seminoles, developed a formidable fighting force which resisted any attempts to control them by the Spanish, the British, the French or, after the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the Americans.

In 1817-18 an American general, Andrew Jackson, led an attack into the area of east Florida. During the fighting, Jackson captured and court-martialled two British traders, Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister, for "aiding the enemy". One was hanged, the other was shot.

British public opinion was incensed, but more over the killing of the two traders rather than any concern about the issue of slavery — after all, Parliament did not pass the Emancipation Act until 1833, and slaves were still held in the British Caribbean until 1837. — *D H Palmer, Manchester*

WE OFTEN **hear people described as "intellectuals". I would like to be one. Can this be achieved by reading selected books? If so, which?**

THE questioner may well find he already qualifies. At Christmas dinner with my parents, I referred to the Guardian. Conversation halted. The silence was broken by my mother: "Oh," she said, "an *intellectual.*" My parents are Daily Telegraph readers. — *Cicely Heaviside, Huddersfield*

I RECOMMEND the popular handbook The Dummy's Guide To Being An Intellectual. — *Ken Frank, Claremont, California, USA*

TO BECOME an intellectual: think a lot; read a lot; never, ever, do anything. — *Mick Furey, Maltby, Rotherham*

THE qualifications for recognition vary from country to country. As a rough guide: in Germany an intellectual is someone who has written a book about Hegel; in America an intellectual is someone who has read Hegel; in England an intellectual is someone who has heard of Hegel. — *Peter J Yearwood, Reading*

ANYONE with a genuine interest in ideas is an intellectual. There is no reason why a philosophically minded illiterate should not be considered an intellectual. On the other hand, no matter what books you read, they will never make you into an intellectual if you read them not out of genuine interest but with some other motive — in order, for example, to become an intellectual. — *Stephen Shenfield, Providence, Rhode Island, USA*

WHAT **is the longest word with no recurring letters?**

THE Addendum to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, third edition, has "Dermatoglyphics", which has 15 letters. — *Eric Smith, Antigua, West Indies*

IT IS **often said that the only man-made object visible from space is the Great Wall of China. How can this be so?**

THE Great Wall is not the only man-made object that has this claim to fame. Western Australia's Super-Pit gold mine, in Kalgoorlie, which when completed will measure five km long, two km wide and 500m deep, is said to be clearly visible from the moon. — *Brooke Goode, Peapack, New Jersey, USA*

WHO **invented playing cards and what is the origin of Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs and Spades?**

PLAYING CARDS evolved from the tarot card set, the symbolic picture cards used for cartomancy. The modern-day cards are derived from the 10 numeral and four court cards for each of four suits, which form part of the 78-card tarot set.

Instead of Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs and Spades they have Cups, Coins, Clubs and Swords. In time the tarot's Knight and Page cards merged into one card, the Jack.

The remaining 22 cards in the tarot, the Major Arcana, were dropped when the cards were used strictly for card games, with the exception of the Fool, which became the Joker. — *Natasha Stafford, Lillian Rock, NSW, Australia*

Any answers?

IS **big beautiful?** — ***Adrienne Dench, Auckland, New Zealand***

ON THE **back of a fruit juice carton, it says "the cranberry is one of the three fruits native to North America". What are the other two?** — ***Deborah Tacon, Chester***

I AM **told that when foxes and rabbits cohabit a warren, the foxes do not eat their "own" rabbits. Is this true, and if so, why?** — ***Frank Boumphrey, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, USA***

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

In the land of legend

Paul Evans

THE wind roars above the wooded valley that breaks through cliffs into Cornwall's Atlantic coast between Tintagel and Boscastle. Somehow a pair of buzzards manage short flights over the treetops without being flung out to sea. They're staking their claim to the place, guardians of it's eerie stillness below the gale. It is a stillness of trees wrapped in moss and polypody fern, of flowering violets and daffodils beside the stream, but it also has the reputation for being one of the most haunted valleys in this ghost-shadowed land. Frances Horovitz wrote: "Now is the time for walking in woods/ by the cold stream come from the waterfall/ are you afraid?" Afraid of what?

Perhaps the waterfall itself. At the head of the valley the springs and trickles gorged with rain fuse together and smash through a fissure of rock to crash 20m down into St Nectan's kieve (Cornish for basin). The kieve is a 7m deep cauldron in which the water churns and boils over, bursting through a hole to pour into the Trevillitt river. Above the kieve, at least three different levels, are the remains of similar basins formed by the same hydraulic force, the top basin nearly 7m above the present one. Below the kieve a new basin in being hammered out that will eventually replace it. It is estimated that within 300 years the depression will only be as deep as a saucer — such a time scale makes our moment on earth so ephemeral.

Around 500 AD, the hermit Nectan built his shrine at the top of the falls. Local tradition has it that he built a tower in which a silver bell rang to warn sailors of the treacherous rocks along this part of the coast. Towards the end of his life Nectan's Celtic faith was under siege from the Romans and in an act of defiance he hurled his silver bell into the kieve. There are stories of this submerged bell ringing as an omen of ill fortune, of ghostly monks chanting in the valley and of St Nectan's sisters, the "Grey Ladies", who still wander here. Being so close to Tintagel, the legendary birthplace of King Arthur, this place is also wrapped in the Arthurian mythology that has become a local industry. The knights of the round table are supposed to have cleansed themselves in the waterfall before setting off in search of the holy grail from St Nectan's sixth century shrine.

The chapel of St Nectan's hermitage became a ruin, and in 1860 a cottage was built on the site and extended into a chalet-style bungalow in 1900. The people who now own it charge visitors to see the waterfall. But this has not been a happy arrangement and 15,000 visitors a year became an overpowering pressure. The falls have been closed for some years and only recently reopened due to local pressure. This is still a strangely violent, contested place.

The waterfall's wild power and uterine symbolism shapes the imagination as it shapes the valley. The noise of the water is deafening and absorbs the sound of the gale roaring above. The spray from the falls allows the chasm to support a rainforest of ferns, mosses and liverworts that thrive in the pounding chaos. The simplest of things assume wonderful significance. An ash seed key on its single wing spirals into the void of the chasm and flickers downward. In the slow-motion moment of its descent the violence of the waterfall and the violence of the storm subsides as a space of tranquil solitude opens up in the wildness.

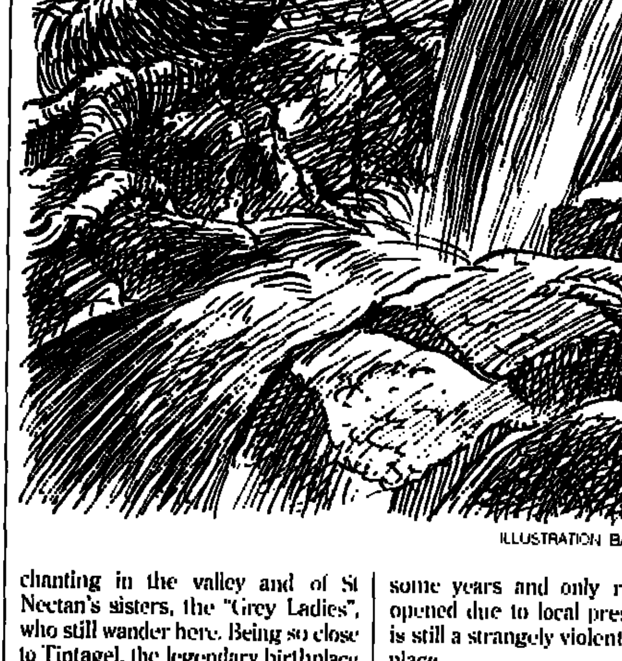


ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

Chess Leonard Barden

LINARES **1998, which finished this month, was the second-highest-rated tournament in chess history (after Las Palmas 1996) and yet another attempt to create a modern equivalent to historical élite tournaments such as St Petersburg 1914 and Avro 1938.**

Yet Linares had only seven players competing, which was odd in more than one sense: was the exclusion of an eighth player just a way of giving the GMs an extra rest day, or a studied insult to the Fide champion, Anatoly Karpov?

Either way, it made for a lopsided event, with only India's Vishy Anand representing the rest of the world against five ex-Soviets and the Bulgarian Topalov. The inclusion of Britain's Michael Adams, for example, would have made for a more competitive tournament.

Linares had more positive play than the dull Las Palmas 1996, but there was also plenty of jockeying for position with cautious draws. This was further proof that the belief that an all-élite field makes for memorable chess may be flawed: mixed-strength events have a better dynamic, and even the front-runners at St Petersburg and Avro had outclassed players — Siegbert Tarrasch and Frank Marshall, then José Capablanca and Salo Flohr.

The most significant result in the first half at Linares was Kasparov's win from Anand, which maintained the psychological edge he has held over the world No 3 since their 1995 match.

G Kasparov v V Anand

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Nd7 5 Ng5 Ngf6 6 Bd3 e6 Of course h6? 7 Ne6! would give Kasparov vicarious revenge for his loss to Deep Blue.

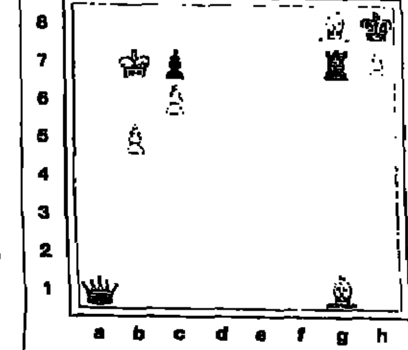
7 N1f3 Bd6 8 Qe2 h6 9 Ne4 Nxe4 10 Qxe4 Qc7 11 Qg4 Rg8 A new move. It works out badly, so Anand reverted to the normal Kf8 in a later game, drawing easily. Later still, Vassily Ivanchuk innovated by 6 . . . Ndf6 and scored a fine win, so this opening is the GM flavour of the month.

12 Nd2! Nf6 13 Qf3 e5 14 dxe5 Bxe5 15 Nc4 Be6 16 Bd2 0-0-0 17 0-0-0 Nd7 18 Rhe1 Rge8 19 Kb1 White can gain the bishop pair any time, since the e5 piece can't run away (Bf6? 20 Bf4 and Nd6+). Anand's defence wrecks his own pawn structure.

g5 20 h4 Bf4 21 Bxf4 gxf4 22 Bf5! Nf8 If Bxf5 23 Rxe8 and 24 Nd6+. **23 Qh5 Kb8 24 Bxe6 Nxe6 25 a4!** Weak pawns can't run away, so Kasparov plays to restrict Black over the whole board.

Qc7 26 Qe5+ Qc7 27 Qh5 Qe7 28 b3 Qf6 29 Ne5 Rc7 30 Ng4 Rxd1+ 31 Rxd1 Qg7 32 f3! Re8 33 Qf5 Ka8 34 h5! Rf8 35 Rd7 Resigns. White threatens 36 Qxe6, and most queen or knight moves lose a pawn at f7, f4 or h6. 35 . . . Qg5 36 Qxg5 hxg5 staves off material loss, but then the h5 pawn runs through. Vintage Kasparov.

No 2516



White mates in three moves, against any defence (by H von Gottschall, 1926).

No 2515: 1 Nh8 Kxe4 2 Kc4 Kf5 3 Kd5 Kf6 4 Qe5 mate.

Bridge Zia Mahmood

THE Camrose Trophy for the home international series was this year contested for the last time as a four-team event. Next season, Eire will join England, Scotland Northern Ireland and Wales. Scotland took a lead of 10 Victory Points over England into the final weekend of matches in Glasgow.

With 20 Victory Points at stake in each of three matches, this margin was going to be difficult but not impossible for the English to overcome. When Scotland won the first match 15-5, though, it meant that they only had to win the second to leave England behind.

The Scottish team piled on the pressure, but England stood up to it well, and the result was in doubt until this deal appeared. It is Game All, West is the dealer, and your hand is South:

♠ J 8 4 ♥ 8 6 ♦ 2 ♣ K J 10 8 6 4 3

West on your left opens with one diamond, and East on your right responds two hearts — natural and game-forcing. A jump to four clubs can take away bidding space from the enemy, but such bids often have the effect of helping declarer — even if they escape being doubled for a huge penalty! So the English South player passed, and the auction developed like this:

South	West	North	East
	1♦	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♠	Pass	4 NT
Pass	5♣	Pass	6♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Three spades, four clubs, four diamonds and four spades were all cue bids, though not necessarily promising first-round control (ace or void). Four no trumps was Blackwood and the response showed one ace. What opening lead would you make?

The chances are that partner has an ace — if he did not, the opponents might well have tried for a grand slam. If his ace is standing up, you need one more trick. Can partner be about to ruff a club?

No, thought England's South player; if that were the case, he would have made a Lightner double of six hearts, suggesting a void somewhere and asking for the lead of a long suit. But a club lead might work anyway; that is the suit that the opponents have cue bid only once, after all. You have all the evidence. Make your choice.

At the table, South decided to hope that his partner's ace was in diamonds, so he led his singleton of that suit. His partner had the ace of diamonds, but . . .

North
♠ Q 9 7 5 3
♥ 4
♦ A Q 10 9 6 5 3
♣ None

West	East
♠ K 10	♠ A 6 2
♥ Q 9 7	♥ A K J 10 5 3 2
♦ K 8 7 4	♦ J
♣ A Q 7 5	♣ 9 2

South
♠ J 8 4
♥ 8 6
♦ 2
♣ K J 10 8 6 4 3

North did the best he could, winning the diamond lead with the ace rather than the queen and returning a low card. But East was not fooled: he ruffed high and quickly claimed 12 tricks. North had not made the Lightner double of six hearts because he was expecting a club lead anyway on the bidding, and he was not sure that his ace of diamonds would stand up after West had opened the bidding in the suit. So the trophy went north again. ©

Quick crossword no. 411

Across

1 5th century missionary to Ireland (5,7)
9 Cast out (5)
10 Bun usually toasted and buttered (7)
11 Mountain lake (4)
12 Pessimistic (8)
14 London film studios (6)
15 Not finished — ruined (6)
18 Unit of measure of radiation dose (8)
20 Oil used in margarine making (4)
22 Distinguished (7)
23 Overweight (5)
24 Lobby (8,4)

Down

2 Clothing (7)
3 Of no effect (4)
4 Police/scout unit (6)
5 Tuition — practice (8)
6 Likeness (5)
7 Understood the procedure (4,3,5)
8 Zephyr (6,6)
13 Curse — church ban (8)
16 Boring for the extraction of petroleum (3,4)
17 Feverish (6)
19 Live (5)
21 Nocturnal insect (4)

Last week's solution

Body and soul

CINEMA
Richard Williams

ONLY four people die by violence during the course of Quentin Tarantino's Jackie Brown, a body count that might disappoint some of the director's fans. There isn't much of a splatter-factor either. The first victim is dispatched in the distance, hidden from our sight; the second, a woman, dies off screen; and the blood leaking from the other two wouldn't fill an eggcup. After making his name with the stylish, humorous ultra-violence of Reservoir Dogs and Pulp Fiction, Tarantino gives us a surprise: a film in which character is everything.

Few directors can have faced the task of making their third film under such a burden of expectation. Tarantino helped to define a moment in which sensibilities were changing. It is greatly to his credit that he makes meeting the challenge seem like enormous fun.

By choosing to adapt someone else's story, he may appear to have taken the heat off himself. But so thoroughly does he rearrange the bones of Elmore Leonard's Rum Punch, a novel about complicated scams set in the world of minor-league gun-runners, that the film becomes almost as much the director's work as its predecessors were.

Moving the action from Miami to the unfashionable south Los Angeles districts of his childhood enables him to create a pungent authenticity, both on the streets and inside a succession of apartments, bars and shopping malls. And by changing the skin colour of the main character from white to black, he is able to saturate the film with the seventies soul-music sensibility appropriate to the character of Jackie Brown, a flight attendant in her mid-40s.

When we meet Jackie (Pam Grier) in the title sequence, she is striding confidently through the airport terminal to the swirling sound of Bobby Womack's "Across 110th Street". In her shoulder bag is a stack of $100 bills destined for her friend Ordell (Samuel L Jackson), who sells guns to criminals and frightened shopkeepers alike.


A film in which character is everything . . . Pam Grier in the title role of Jackie Brown

Apprehended by a couple of federal agents (Michael Keaton and Michael Bowen), Jackie agrees to help entrap Ordell, on the promise of her own freedom. Ordell, meanwhile, engages a veteran bail bondsman, Max (Robert Forster), who secures her release but then finds himself involved in Jackie's ambitious scheme for a triple-cross. On Ordell's side are his girlfriend, the permanently stoned Melanie (Bridget Fonda), and his slug-witted accomplice Louis (Robert De Niro), a couple of losers who can't resist the obvious temptation.

By anyone's standards, the central performances are substantial, led by Grier's memorable portrait of a woman confronting middle age. When she enters the shopping mall for the climactic handover of a bag filled with half a million dollars, an endless tracking shot is brilliantly choreographed to the rhythms of the Crusaders' "Street Life"; in her face we see a lifetime's conflict of desire and realism. Her relationship with the taciturn Max eventually creates an emotional core of surprising tenderness.

Taking the place of physical violence as the film's provocative element is Ordell's language. Tarantino is correct to defend the character's incessant use of the term "nigger" on the grounds of idiomatic accuracy, and Jackson delivers the gun-runner's lines with a bullying energy that survives his gradual removal from the centre of the story.

At 154 minutes, Jackie Brown is half an hour too long, and most of the slack is in the dull scenes between Grier and Keaton. Yet, while missing greatness, it makes a convincing reply to the questions raised by Tarantino's earlier achievements. This is a real film-maker, after all. And as one of his characters drives out of the movie, lip-synching to the sweet soul music in a wonderful moment of humdrum transcendence, we're already asking ourselves what he's going to do next.

QUIET, SERIOUS films about normal middle-class people facing problems in their emotional lives — why on earth can't the British make them? Conversely, what is it about the French that enables them to turn them out so reliably? Marion Verdoux's Love etc brings up these familiar questions not only because it exemplifies the French aptitude for the genre, but also because the story is adapted from a novel by an English author.

True, Julian Barnes is the most Francophile of the present generation of British novelists, but the protagonists and the setting of the original novel were British.

Yet the result is a very French film. In part this is because we instinctively associate its set-up — two men and a girl, trapped in an infernal triangle — with that of Truffaut's Jules Et Jim. To people born, like Barnes, in 1947, this was the film that defined a certain French attitude, something to do with bittersweetness and sophistication. And here we have two 30-year-olds, Benoit (Yvan Attal), a shy young banker, and Pierre (Charles Berling), a charming wastrel, friends since childhood, meeting Marie (Charlotte Gainsbourg), a picture restorer, and getting themselves into a tangle.

Benoit, so recessive that he can't make conversation for fear of being thought boring, replies to Marie's lonely-hearts ad. They meet, fall in love, get married and move into a chic converted *quincaillerie*, to which Pierre is a frequent visitor. But he is circling with an intent that matures into a full-blown obsession as he imposes himself on Marie in person and by telephone. Finally, he takes a room in the hotel opposite, from which to watch her.

I say "watch" rather than "spy on" because malevolence is never a factor here. This is a story about helplessness in the face of love.

So there are the ingredients: bags of charm, good looks, nice clothes, absence of *faux pas*, strong and finely detailed performances, a powerful but unjudgmental moral sense, and a knockout ending. Just another French movie, really.

Storming success

JAZZ
John Fordham

IN HIS 74 years George Russell has produced some of the most audacious music composed for jazz line-ups or classical/jazz ensembles. His more recent pieces, however, have occasionally seemed rather indigestible in texture and given to excesses of galumphing funk. That made this marathon performance at London's Barbican all the more surprising: it was one of the best shows I have seen in 20 years.

The George Russell Living Time Orchestra, which at times expanded to a hybrid symphony-jazz band almost 80-strong, was performing as part of the ambitious Inventing America series. But it reached even higher.

In a storm of sound that lasted almost three hours, the mix of American, British and French musicians resembled a vast rock'n'roll band, a Moroccan folk ensemble, a symphonic band playing a hoe-down, a free-jazz group, a jostling crowd of Dixieland street-stompers, a scholarly Schoenbergian tone-row outfit whose drinks had been spiked, and plenty more besides.

The gig spanned the whole of Russell's career, from the delightful twisted-bop melody and cruising grooves of the fifties' Stratusphunk and the writhing, jostling lines of All About Rosie, through the minimalisms of Vertical Form VI to the current American Trilogy, in which You Are My Sunshine plaintively calls across squalling, dissonant chords.

Almost 40 string and woodwind players from the Guildhall and the Paris Conservatoire were on stage for much of the time, and in the first set they galloped animatedly through the all-notated Dialogue With Ornette on their own, under arranger Pat Hollenbeck's direction.

Andy Sheppard's powerful tenor sax was prominent among the soloists, as were the trumpets of Stanton Davis and Britain's Guy Barker, the booming trombone of Dave Bargeron, and guitarist Mike Walker. But drummer Billy Ward was almost the star of the night.

At the finale, Russell performed a little Cab Calloway boogie in front of the band, as if the liberated energies had astonished even him.

Long overdue accolade for Niemeyer

Jonathan Glancey on the Brazilian architect who has finally been honoured

***THE* great Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, loved and lionised by young designers, has been awarded the world's most prestigious prize for architecture at the age of 91.**

It is amazing that Niemeyer, born in Rio de Janeiro in 1907, has had to wait so long for the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture. Among the British establishment, he appears either to have been forgotten or simply to be out of style and favour.

But he has been recently rediscovered by the young, and particularly by the well travelled: he has rarely built outside Brazil.

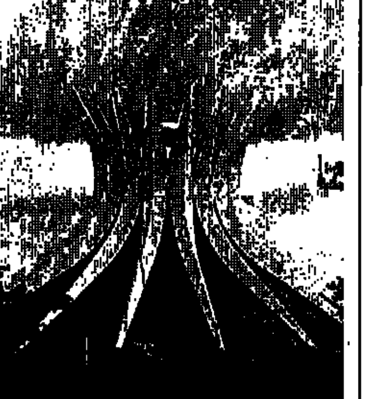
Niemeyer, a founding member of the Modern Movement, was the leading disciple of Le Corbusier (1887-1965), with whom he collaborated on the design of the ministry of health and education building in Rio (1936), the Brazilian pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939, and the United Nations building in New York, between 1947 and 1952.

Niemeyer is best known, though, for the monumentally poetic government buildings that he designed for Brasilia, the Brazilian capital he masterminded and in effect built with the planner Lucio Costa between 1955 and 1958 under the dynamic presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek, an optimistic expansionist who believed in Brazil's destiny as a major player on the world stage.

The presidential palace, the federal supreme court, and above all the national congress, with its twin towers and twin domes (one inverted), are buildings that, once seen, are never forgotten. They owed as much to the monuments of the ancient world for inspiration as they did to the precepts and propagandising of the Modern Movement.

Niemeyer also designed Brasilia's cathedral, a swooping concrete structure in the guise of a crown of thorns.

He built his own house in Rio in 1954, on a hillside overlooking the ocean. Where Walter Gropius and other founding fathers of the Modern Movement believed in a functional architecture rooted in an industrial aesthetic and mass-production technology, Niemeyer was always a poet in spirit. His buildings reveal his hand as surely as Gropius tried, vainly, to hide his.


The Brasilia cathedral, in the form of a crown of thorns

"Architecture, as Le Corbusier told me, is invention," he says, "and mine is very personal. It is the search for beauty, the search for a different form within the miraculous possibilities of technique and functional objectives."

In 1964 Niemeyer went into voluntary exile in Europe after a military coup. The generals ran the country for the next 21 years; during their dictatorship more than 200,000 people were imprisoned, many tortured and killed.

In France Niemeyer designed the headquarters of the Communist party in Paris (1966) and the cultural centre at Le Havre.

Niemeyer returned to Brasilia in 1970. Some of his finest work dates from very recently, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rio. Current projects — Niemeyer is never less than busy — include a cultural centre in Barra da Tijuca in Rio.

Few 20th century architects have been able to build a body of such powerful, highly individual monuments.

Ancient exuberance for local heroes

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

ADAM HART-DAVIS hopes I won't mention this. But look at it this way: it's an encouraging instance of how a boy can improve out of all recognition over 40 years. Then again, it just tickles me pink.

In 1959 Rupert Hart-Davis (father of Adam) wrote to George Lyttleton (father of Humphrey): "Adam reports that his boys' maid has got her own television set and he wonders whether the Welfare State hasn't gone a little too far."

This is the very same Adam who brightened up TV no end in Local Heroes (BBC2) by pedalling and puffing up Etna on a folding bike. (With scattered applause from the little group who are always around to encourage eccentrics. They were there when Eddie the Eagle took off.)

Snow lay on the lava. You couldn't see your mittens in front of your face for sulphurous smoke. Hart-Davis gasped: "I'm getting a lot closer to the crater now. You can tell that because there is a lot of steam coming out — ow!" (His commentary is often punctuated with ows.) "I can't see where I'm going because my specs are steamed up." At this point his pea-green jacket vanished into billowing smoke.

Oh, dear.

How very like Empedocles who, according to Hart-Davis, took his followers up Etna and said "I am immortal! I am going to prove it! Watch this!" and jumped into the crater.

"The experiment," as BBC publicity puts it, straight-faced, "failed." Then again, it didn't. Empedocles lives, OK.

Apart from Empedocles, who died at a sprightly 60, most of the antique scientists Hart-Davis told us about seemed encouragingly, well, antique. This did not appear to interest him at all but, by God, it interests me.

Pythagoras died at 80. Xenophanes at 82. Thinking is clearly good for you. With this proviso. Archimedes was 75 and going strong when a Roman soldier found him so irritating he ran him through. There is something about a scientist that makes some people itch to chuck a brick at him.

Hence National Science Week, to try to make us love and appreciate them. Hart-Davis bubbles with the sort of fizzing enthusiasm usually only seen in TV cooks. His two specials from Egypt and Italy were the BBC's most exuberant tribute to science.

To watch him excitedly demonstrating continuous air pressure in the street with a shaky rendition of Baa Baa Black Sheep, a child's mouth organ and a large quantity of bright plastic buckets raised the heart. Passing Egyptians stopped passing and watched engrossed.

The mountain bike colours of his rig — shocking pink and screaming green — are an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual gaiety. If he looks like a child's colouring book, at least he appeals to the childlike heart. What small boy wouldn't be fascinated to know that Pythagoras fiercely forbade his followers to pee on their toenail clippings? Or, knowing that, could resist having a go?

Handfuls of dust leap to life at Hart-Davis's touch. He went to Sicily, where Archimedes lived. Archimedes rarely washed, finding it a waste of good thinking time. If forced into a bath, he went on drawing diagrams in the dirt on his skin and in the oil they poured over him. And, of course, he went on thinking. Hence the one thing we all know about Archimedes.

One thing I didn't know is that he is said to have burned an invading fleet by using solar energy. According to legend, he did it with mirrors. "Can he have done it?" fizzed Hart-Davis and, catching the Sicilian sun in 96 small mirrors, bounced it back onto a boat. The wood started to scorch. "Two hundred and thirty degrees! That's amazing! Just look at this . . . ow!"

Television has made a little industry lately of cutting off heroes at the knees. Lord Reith, Baden-Powell, Douglas Bader (even though he was already cut off at the knees). "I don't believe," wrote James Thurber about a delinquent dog he owned as a boy, "I ever thought that that dog had a fault." Hart-Davis is not a fault finder. This is so unusual it is original.

Best foot forward

DANCE
Judith Mackrell

BILL T JONES is a choreographer with ambition and a big heart, and he sees no reason why his dances shouldn't reflect the world that he knows, cherishes and rails against. His fractured, provocative and stubbornly rebellious works have thus told his audience a lot about his feelings over the years — about being black and gay, about his lover Arnie Zane dying of Aids, about the fact that he too is HIV-positive.

In Still/Here (1994) Jones notoriously explored what it means to be sentenced to an early death, drawing his material from workshops with terminally ill patients. As in many of his works, he used spoken text as a means of bearing witness, as well as huge video images of the patients, and the show sparked a vitriolic debate about how far dance could decently go in handling the raw pain of life. Its critics called it "victim art".

But the real issue wasn't so much what was or wasn't appropriate material for dance. It was the fact that Still/Here didn't, for some of us, measure up to the challenge of such grave issues. Though starkly moving in parts, the choreography left an uneasy sense of what it had tried and failed to say.

Four years on, however, Jones says he's shifted emotional gear. He's not so much an outsider with a "burning breast", more an artist trying to create some "beauty worthy of contemplation". And certainly his latest work, We Set Out Early . . . Visibility Was Poor, at London's Peacock Theatre, is the most dance-focused and serenely ordered piece I've seen from him.

It is still characteristically ambitious, in that it seems to offer a personal recall of the whole 20th century and a vision of where we may be heading. The narrative structure is supplied by three musical milestones — Stravinsky's Soldier's Tale (1918), scores by John Cage from the middle of the century, and a recent work by Latvian composer Peteris Vask.

And one of Jones's most vivid effects in the piece is to make us see his dancers as a figurative travelling community journeying through the decades.

In the first section the Arnie Zane Dance Company move with a capricious, sharp-angled formality that reminds us of marionettes or harlequins. They step with deft, almost comic precision between formations, occasionally launching into solo routines of larky acrobatic dance. Although Jones makes no deliberate references, they remind us of Picasso's circus canvases or Massine's *commedia dell'arte* ballets — a troupe of travelling entertainers setting out on a journey whose destination doesn't much matter.

In the second section the stage darkens, and the dancers move with a grounded deliberation, shifting gravely in and out of formal alignment. Cage's music is full of contemplative spaces, as if this section represents a significant transition. A huge oval passes slowly across the back of the stage, its delicate, crumpled surface lit like moonlight. It marks a rite of passage, but also recalls, maybe unintentionally, a similar disc that passes through one of Merce Cunningham's greatest works — Cunningham being Cage's collaborator and a definitive choreographer of the mid-century.

The final section opens with the dancers facing an expanse of clear blue light, as if they are standing at the edge of the planet, staring at the new millennium. They seem unable to resolve whether they should be ecstatic or agonised. They gabble silent words and their bodies are edgy and rootless. Vask's music scales Wagnerian heights, but their faces freeze into a rictus of alarm. And even when Jones allows them to relax into an amicable dance, a woman who keeps running in to embrace her partner is repeatedly sucked back off the stage — lost into the past or death.

Finally, the whole cast jive together in a determined stance of hope and unity — except for one man who pursues a solitary, questing dance. It's a choice of how we enter the future: together or alone. And, as one of the many fine and resonant images in this piece, it reminds us how gifted Jones is as a crafter of stage pictures.


Moving on . . . Maya Saffrin and Rosalynde LeBlanc in Bill T Jones's latest work We Set Out Early PHOTO: TRISTRAM KENTON

Unfortunately, he's not yet so gifted a crafter of pure dance, and though this piece is certainly his richest and most structured choreography to date, there are still passages of slack. He can do A and B gorgeously, but not always the phrases in between. He also cannot let us go without some hectoring, and the moments where the dancers are presumably meant to be at their most heart-warming are the most irksomely insistent. As they giggle at nothing and try to make us laugh at their idiosyncrasies, they work too hard at convincing us of their humanity. Far more moving as an image of community is Jones's demonstration that as a choreographer he finally wants to reach out and take up the threads of his dance and musical past.

Digging at rich seams

THEATRE
Michael Billington

***PLAYS* often make good movies. Films rarely turn into successful plays. But Mark Herman's Brassed Off works a treat at Sheffield's Crucible, not least because of the vibrant sound of a genuine colliery band.**

Paul Allen's stage adaptation sticks very closely to the outline, and much of the dialogue, of the film. We see the painful consequences for a group of South Yorkshire miners of the closure of their local pit, and the desperate last attempt to keep the colliery band intact as a tribute to its dying leader, Danny.

In some respects, Allen has even improved on the original. The romance between Andy, a luckless young miner, and Gloria, the southern exile who returns to her roots and turns out to be employed by the pit management, is sharpened by a post-coital scene in which they air their passionate differences. And, in this version, Gloria enlists the help of the militant miners' wives to raise the money to send the band to London's Albert Hall rather than simply writing out a cheque like Lady Bountiful.

Of course, there is loss as well as gain in the transfer. You miss the actual physical texture of a Yorkshire mining village. Gloria is left to carry out an awkward imaginary argument with the invisible pit management, and Allen's device of presenting the action through the eyes of Danny's grandson places undue strain on a boy actor.

But overall the event is a great success. It is heartening, in these straitened times, to see a regional theatre presenting a story that reflects its own community. And there is something about the authentic sound of brass — and Grimethorpe Colliery Band is one of four groups that will be alternating during the run — that is profoundly moving.

You could argue that their very quality tends to undermine Danny's complaints about the band's wobbly sound; but the moment when you hear them distantly playing in the theatre foyer while on stage a miner's furniture is cruelly repossessed brings alive the story's constant tension between aesthetic aspiration and ugly social reality.

Deborah Paige's production, which will move to the Olivier in London in June, makes excellent use of the Crucible's wide open stage. There is also high-class acting from Peter Armitage as the obsessive Danny, who finally realises that the sound of music cannot compensate for the death of a community; from Freya Copeland, who lends Gloria a sharp-suited sexiness as well as playing a mean flugelhorn; and from James Thornton, as her guilt-ridden lover.

But the strength of the evening lies in the way the play articulates the anger of Yorkshire communities not just against pit closures but against the erosion of a way of life. The play speaks directly, and very emotionally, to its audience and their response in Sheffield was unequivocal.

Dogma in the dark ages

William Shawcross

Headed For The Blues:
A Memoir With Ten Stories
by Josef Skvorecky
translated by Peter Kussi, Caleb Crain, Kaca Polackova Henly
Faber 280pp £9.99

JOSEF SKVORECKY is one of the great Czech writers of the cruel post-war communist years. His new book does not disappoint. Subtitled "A memoir with ten stories", it is in fact several. All, of course, describe aspects of the grim dogmas that descended on Czechoslovakia after the Soviet occupation of 1945, the Soviet-inspired communist coup of 1948, and the 20 years of Stalinist and post-Stalinist dictatorship that followed until the brief sprint towards "socialism with a human face" led by Alexander Dubcek in 1968, which ended with the Soviet invasion, renewed occupation and 20 more years of dictatorship even more depressing than the first, which only ended after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The first half of the book tells in impressionistic, biting, angry form his own Bohemian story and the stories of his friends as they struggled to remain true to at least themselves (some of them, anyway) and yet to survive, if not prosper, in the so-called proletarian state. The theme of the entire book is survival — the deals and the compromises it takes to stay alive, and to try to keep sanity, if not morality, alive.

Among those who do is "Madame Editor", a female version of the vicar of Bray — a prim and conservative writer in the forties, who then became a Catholic apologist after the war who believed in miracles and was shocked when a drunken communist journalist groped her and clearly "wanted me to do his bidding! . . . that's Bolshevism for you."

After the communists took power she was thrown off her paper and given a job in a factory, where she slowly began to understand the merits of the workers' and peasants' society and set up house with the foreman, and was then seen sporting a five-point red star on her dress and lecturing "comrade" workers on how to behave.

There is Judge Bohadlo, a self-satisfied gourmand who decided to become a communist in 1948 because "someone's got to stick it out, to save what can be saved". In private he kept on cursing communism, but then went to meetings where he would excoriate the capitalists. The communists went on promoting him — until he died of a stroke. Death, writes Skvorecky, "is still the best Political Inspector".

The most charming tale is "The Well Screened Lizette", a "snake in the grass". Skvorecky's young hero, the saxophonist, was sacked from university because he played jazz and was therefore suspected of Western sympathies. "Like a bloody fool, I turned up at the screening session in coloured socks." That was really suspicious to "the cross-eyed political inspector with buck teeth". He stared at them every time he asked an important question such as, "Are you descended from the working class, colleague?"

Lizette, on the other hand, did no work and understood nothing, except how to operate the system. She lowered her eyelids and pushed out her bosom and was constantly promoted by the desperate men to whom she promised sex (she rarely delivered) becoming a renowned "expert" on Old Church Slavonic, then philology and then Marxism.

She was presented as "a typical socialist woman of our day", and sent abroad to lecture on the achievements of the Communist party. After meeting a man from the foreign ministry, "she was named cultural attaché in Rio de Janeiro, in place of a fellow named Hrubes who has been studying Portuguese for five years in expectation of the assignment . . . I expect one day she'll become the first woman president of this country. And then at last we'll have real socialism."

Skvorecky conveys beautifully the shadowlands of life under the long dreary, frightening and destructive years of "dictatorship of the people", years that destroyed the lives of an entire generation.

To order this book at the special price of £8.99 please contact CultureShop (see ad on page 34)

Pens mightier than swords

Matthew Sweeney

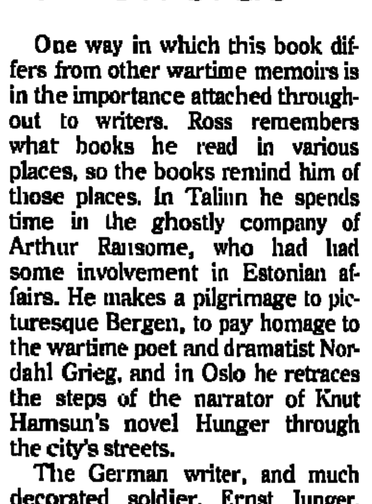
Winter Sea
by Alan Ross
Harvill 152pp £14.99

THIS is a book dominated by things northern — the north of Germany, Norway, Estonia and, most of all, the seas that those coastlines interrupt. It is also, for all its accounts of the author's recent travels to those places, a book that is dominated by the past.

In 1945 Alan Ross, then in the Royal Navy, was involved in the redistribution of the German fleet among the victorious Allies. He struck up a friendship with a German officer, Korvetten-Katitan Schlemmer. Although he had fashionable naval connections, Schlemmer was no Nazi, and indeed turned out to be part Estonian, on his mother's side, and moved there shortly before he died, "returning", as he put it in a letter to Ross, "to nowhere from somewhere". He and Ross kept in regular contact through the years and after Schlemmer died Ross decided to revisit Estonia and other scenes of his past.

So the book is part travel book, part memoir, with a load of poems thrown in. It opens with Ross on a ferry, heading for Talinn, but almost immediately flashes back to his first visit there, at the end of the war, handing over Schlemmer's ship to the Russians. This then-and-now switchbacking recurs and gives a curious attractiveness to the book, but it is the past that comes out strongest, with the present being refracted through it.

Ross is sympathetic to the vast disruption brought by the war to the lives of the eastern Europeans, Germans, Balts and Slavs, for whom the notion of home must seem like a mirage. He recalls himself stationed in north Germany in 1946, wandering among the wreckage, "a connoisseur of rubble, a fantasist of what has been and what would be, guided only by etchings and old maps". Always curious, he didn't obey to the letter Monty's policy of non-fraternisation. He describes how facing practical problems in a humane and tolerant way was more useful then than abstract philosophical thinking. The experience marked him greatly. Even now, travelling on German trains, the images of Jews being piled into them on their journeys east more than 50 years earlier make him shudder.



One way in which this book differs from other wartime memoirs is in the importance attached throughout to writers. Ross remembers what books he read in various places, so the books remind him of those places. In Talinn he spends time in the ghostly company of Arthur Ransome, who had had some involvement in Estonian affairs. He makes a pilgrimage to picturesque Bergen, to pay homage to the wartime poet and dramatist Nordahl Grieg, and in Oslo he retraces the steps of the narrator of Knut Hamsun's novel Hunger through the city's streets.

The German writer, and much decorated soldier, Ernst Junger, whom he came across in 1945, interested Ross greatly as a heroic figure at a time when heroism was suddenly at a discount. Much of Junger's work drew on his wartime experiences and was initially received as a tribute to the idealism of the soldier, but was later seen as documentary evidence of the horrors of war. Ross makes clear at one stage the debt he owes to writers such as these: "When for so long the war seemed shapeless and infinite, it was from writers who had made something of tough and exacting conditions that we learnt to value the experience for its own sake, without questioning its purpose."

Perhaps the oddest feature of this book is the poems that are scattered throughout it, including a selection of new ones at the end. Why weren't they kept back for a future volume of poetry? Sometimes, as in "Smoking", where a cigar-butt flicked into the Thames reminds him of "Just such an evening off Sheringham,/ Leaning over the rail, smoking", we get glimpses of the past in the present, as in the accompanying prose, but more usually there's little connection — or else, a poem reminds us of something we've read in the prose, but doesn't add to it greatly. It's not that all the poems aren't sharp and well written, but they are quiet, and their voice gets a bit lost in all that prose.

And the prose has its own poetry anyway, nowhere more than at the end when the book's title is given its full symbolic weight with the description of the North Sea frozen to the horizon, recalling for Ross Caspar David Friedrich's painting Eismeer, seen in a Hamburg gallery days before. It's a fitting image to conclude a book as sensitive and full of perspective as this.



Tibetan monks with their 'liberator', a Chinese soldier — PHOTOGRAPH: TIBET INFORMATION SERVICE

Steering a route to freedom

William Fiennes

Tibet: The Road Ahead
by Dawa Norbu
Rider Books 392pp £14.99

THE Chinese invaded Tibet on October 7, 1950. The Tibetan army — 8,500 men with 200 machine guns — could do little to slow the advance of the 40,000 well-drilled soldiers of the People's Liberation Army. Local resistance consisted mainly of *magdogs*, the Buddhist rituals intended to prevent war.

The residents of Sakya, a small town in western Tibet, confronted the Chinese troops with the ritual called *dogpa:* they gathered in the street, clapped their hands and cursed. The Chinese smiled, then began to clap too.

Dawa Norbu, now a professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University of New Delhi and an honorary Fellow of the University of Durham, was four years old when the Chinese arrived in Sakya in 1953. His father was a servant on roving missions to Tibet's northern plateau, the region called Dhang Thang where the plains are whitened by a surface crust of potash, soda and borax.

Norbu remembers his father's fatal illness and the rites that accompanied his cremation. He remembers how he had to get to school before the sunlight hit the peaks of the mountains. The first of the 12 boys to arrive was allowed to slap the faces of the other 11 pupils with a piece of split bamboo. The boys blew out their cheeks like fish to receive the blows of the cane.

This is a strange twining of personal testimony and academic history. Norbu grew up during the "peaceful liberation policy" of 1951 to 1959 — years which the Chinese devoted to wooing the Tibetan aristocracy and to setting up the infrastructure of occupation.

The young Norbu was impressed by the energy with which the Chinese began building roads such as the Chamdo-Lhasa Highway. He cannot recall seeing any civilian traffic on these roads, just "military trucks loaded with khaki-clad soldiers and well-concealed goods". He remembers the infiltration of language — the way new Tibetan terms, coined in Beijing, began to crop up in everyday speech: "foreign imperialists", "serf-owners"; "Motherland".

In 1955 Norbu joined the new Chinese-run primary school in Sakya. Basic Marxism and Chinese history were added to the old curriculum. "Peaceful liberation" came to an end in 1959, the year of the Lhasa uprising and the Dalai Lama's flight to India. Monks and "reactionaries" were summarily imprisoned. In prison, Norbu recalls, the Sakya *zodpa*, or governor, tore his monk's robe into strips, twisted the strips into a rope and then hanged himself in his cell.

Norbu's family joined an escape party. Nine families trekked for two weeks across the Tibetan plateau towards the Himalayas, then crossed the mountains by the Sepubula pass into India, convinced they would be back in Tibet by the end of 1960. Norbu's mother and sisters found work building roads along India's northern border. Soon, uncomfortable in the summer heat of Sikkim and wary of malaria, the family packed their tents again and headed for the hill station of Darjeeling. Norbu attended a refugee school while his mother and sisters worked on tea plantations. He would go on to Delhi university, and later to the University of California.

The Cultural Revolution in Tibet was not an ideological struggle so much as a systematic programme of destruction. By 1968 all but one of the 108 monasteries and temples in Sakya had been razed to the ground. It was, as Norbu says, "a monumental loss to human civilisation".

Errors of affiliation

Adam Mars-Jones

The Whereabouts Of Eneas McNulty
by Sebastian Barry
Picador 308pp £12.99

SEBASTIAN BARRY'S new novel is so full of magnetising beauty that it all but harasses a reader into submission. You can try to protest, to say, "I'm a reader and you're a book, can we not keep this on a professional basis?", but the book won't have it. The Whereabouts Of Eneas McNulty is Barry's first novel for 10 years, and during that decade he has made a major mark with his plays, but in these pages he seems most like a poet.

Many sentences seem actively to yearn for an uneven right-hand margin to point up their rhythms and designs: "The cold desert in his mind's eye floods with the thousand small white flowers that are the afterlife of rainfall."

Eneas McNulty is born in Sligo at the turn of the century, first child of a Catholic jobbing tailor, who met his seamstress wife-to-be in the asylum where he worked running up clothing for the inmates. Eneas is dispossessed for the first time when more children come along, but is consoled by friendship with an older boy, Jonno Lynch.

At 16, for no reason except the need to find a place for himself, and a vague desire to rescue poor, suffering France, Eneas joins the British Merchant Navy. His taking of the King's shilling is not a political decision: in a striking phrase applied to the proprietor of the Great Western Hotel in Athlone, he — and the book that contains him — might be described as being "above politics and beneath neutrality".

After the war Eneas compounds his error of affiliation by joining the Royal Irish Constabulary and brands himself, in the changing political climate, definitively traitor. He isn't so stupid as not to know "why there are places in the peelers when there are places nowhere else" but he can hardly predict the slow fuse of hatred that will follow him down the decades.

Sentence of death is confirmed by Jonno, the dear friend estranged. Eneas becomes a sorrowful human comet, travelling in a highly elliptical orbit far from Sligo, in search of a place and an occupation — fishing, farming, digging — but returning at long intervals to whizz, grieving, past his family. He must part from the woman he loves, and never finds a substitute for her. Eneas may be named after a hero whose wanderings were ordained and finally rewarded, but he himself finds no home to replace the one he lost.

Eneas isn't an articulate man as the world sees it, but he has his own eloquence. Sweetly reproached by his pappy for his poor performance as a correspondent, he replies wryly: "The writing hand is a rusty hand, that's true." There are times when Barry misses blarney by only a leprechaun's whisker — when it occurs to Eneas that his pappy is "a bit of a fool, a bit of a colossal fool" — but there's no doubt that the book is a stylistic triumph. The urge to read on is not really a desire to know what happens to the hero next, but to see what new marvels of phrasing Barry will breed from his stock of pet words.

Eneas's character is distinctly idealised, suffering and bewildered but exempted from serious internal tensions. He is less an exile than an involuntary citizen of the world. He suffers mightily, but the prose in which his days and doings are suspended is balm for the reader if not for him. We may wish its hero well in a dim sort of way, but would happily see Eneas driven to the top of the barest crag, if that would guarantee his being struck a few thousand more times by the loving lightning of his maker's language.

Not much fun in the sun

Alex Clark

Undiscovered Country
by Christina Koning
Viking 310pp £12.99

EXPATRIATE communities are a rewarding subject for novels, affording much scope to explore the claustrophobia, tensions and social stratification of a closed group who, in exile, seek to recreate something of home.

In her second novel, Christina Koning gives this productive scenario an added spin by observing much of it through the eyes of an intelligent yet impressionable child, thereby enabling her to convey charm alongside danger, the mundane alongside the outrageous. Set in Venezuela in 1953, Undiscovered Country is largely concerned with the disintegration of the marriage between the Englishwoman Vivienne — a glamorous and rather aloof teacher at the local Shell school — and Jack Lindberg, an ambitious and hard-drinking American oilman. For Jack this marriage is third-time lucky, and for Vivienne an escape from genteel English womanhood for both her and her daughter Antonia, or "Tony".

By far the most substantial — and successful — portion of the novel is seen through Tony's eyes, as she copes with a sense of impending doom and the onset of puberty through a heroic identification with Joan of Arc and Simon Bolivar.

Tony's sense that her life is about to be disrupted has several roots: her stepfather's infidelity with a young Venezuelan woman; the prospect of returning to England to boarding school; and the arrival in the family's midst of a young Dutch boy, Karel van Wel — the son of parents who have fled the Holocaust.

Karel's story is presented as a poignant meditation on the ultimate dispossession, and on the incongruous mixture of catastrophe and blithe surprise that characterised the post-war years.

As a whole, Koning's narrative captures smartly the brittleness and boredom of the expat social scene, as husbands and wives jockey for position in an endless round of cocktail parties, dinners, tennis parties and beach trips. It is a considerable achievement.